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CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD STERN'S story will appear next year in his collection, **Teeth, Dying and Other Matters.**

RICHARD ELLMANN is in England writing a book on Oscar Wilde.

DAVID FERRY, who teaches at Wellesley College, is working on his second book of poems.

COLIN MACINNES is an English novelist and essayist. His most recent book is **England, half English.**

RUFUS MATHEWSON is a member of the Russian Institute at Columbia Universitty.

SUSAN SONTAG will write on the theatre for PR, beginning with the next issue.

JOHN SIMON has written a new collection of essays, **Acid Test.**

Correction: We regret that **ALLEN GROSSMAN'S** name was misspelled in the last issue.

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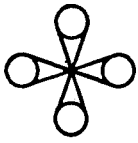

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TEETH

Richard Stern

> In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a phrenzied desire.
>
> —Poe, "Berenice"

Ah Miss Wilmott, how did you come to think what you did? Is all your interpreting so askew, so deformed by self-interest? And is your self-interest so unbroken a pup that any street whistle seems its master's voice? To think that you were misled as wisdom itself was being certified in your aching jaws? Those third molars, so long held back, and then so painfully emergent, fangs and cusps clinging savagely to the gum flesh. "Impacted," said Dr. Hobbie, and despite the kind, soft-beaked, confident face behind the metal glasses, you shuddered. You remembered the last one, also impacted, eight months before, also in the Bank Building, though two flights up on the ninth floor in a large office afloat in the strawberry light off the lake. Dr. Grant, the extractionist, Miss Blade's recommendation, a strong fellow with white moustache and a post on the Executive Council of the American Dental Association, just back from a downtown committee meeting to have a go at your trouble. A lovely May day, the creamy air swimming over the I.C. tracks, enough to make you forget the pain, until Dr. Grant, eyes asweat under his speckled horn rims, leaned over your open mouth and blocked out the view. And then, the tugging, the hammering, the cracking, chiselling, wrestling, blood squirting into the cotton gagging your mouth, blood dripping past it down your throat, your heart pumping,

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your great brow streaming, your wet palm grabbed tight by the fierce little nurse, Miss Romeyne. Afterwards, on the couch, another blow, Dr. Grant sitting beside you, your long legs dripping feet over the edge, hand to your swelling jaw. "How does a hundred dollars sound, Miss Wilmott? Pretty fair? Including post-operant care, anaesthesia, the works. I know you're a teacher."

The pain lasted twelve days, unabated by Miss Blade's late revelation that she had been charged a hundred and twenty-five dollars. For this omission, Miss Blade would not get to know about Dr. Hobbie. Not that she'd appreciate him anyway. Miss Blade favored all the weak sisters in the department, the students with the loudest line of gab and the worst minds who took so long with their dissertations that they completed them and their scholarly life simultaneously.

Miss Wilmott learned of Dr. Hobbie through her once-a-week cleaning woman, Mrs. Spiders, whom she passed in the lobby of the bank as she was on her way to request the bank to honor Dr. Grant's hundred dollars, although her balance was zero until the first of June. Mrs. Spiders was on her way to Dr. Hobbie. "Yeah, Miss Wilma, mah Hobbie's a grand tooth man." Mrs. Spiders' syntax obscured identification, but she spoke of him now and then throughout the year, so that when Miss Wilmott's second tooth began cracking her head open the night after Epiphany, the vision of the great dental surgeon soothed it till morning, when she phoned him up and got a noon appointment. Dr. Hobbie was seldom too busy to squeeze in a sufferer. Half his business was "street business" anyway, delivery boys feeling pain between the first and fifth floors, taxi-drivers from the Yellow Cab Stand, sales people from the local stores, even receptionists from other dentists' offices in the building. A good sign. Not that Miss Wilmott needed confirmatory signs.

Except for that first day. An initial visit to Dr. Hobbie was disconcerting, especially if your appointment came on Wednesdays. Every Tuesday, he danced at the Tall Girl's Club till three a.m., and Wednesday was one long yawn for him. An unrepressed yawn, for Dr. Hobbie repressed no habit that any normal dentist would. No dentist with a smart practice walked around with his smock so loosely tied that a skinny, peppermint-colored back exposed itself to his patients' gaping faces. No normal dentist worked in a shelveless

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closet which barely enabled his movements, and certainly no nurse's. As for answering the phone, tucking it between shoulder and jaw while continuing to drill, or taking long looks at Educational Channel Spanish lessons while working in a silver filling, these were procedures which—Miss Wilmott imagined—might lead to dismissal from the A.D.A. Yes, there was almost no limit to the external defects of Dr. Hobbie's practice.

But Hobbie was a dental genius. In thirty years of agonized dental visits, Miss Wilmott had never known such not-only-painless, but even pleasurable, sensations. Dr. Hobbie's office did not face the strawberry-colored lake air but the west wall of the Bank Building; there were no couches, no magazines, in fact nothing at all in the scarcely redeemed cave of a waiting room but a kitchen chair and a coat rack. But you almost never had to wait, and when you were in the chair, there was almost no pain. The fees were ludicrously small, even for her, a low grade instructor in the History Department. Ten dollars for her impacted wisdom tooth, and for that there were sound-wave drills, the best Swedish steel, a lecture on her lower jaw, Mantovani playing Cole Porter on the hi-fi, and the sweetest of all analgesics, Dr. Hobbie's account of his personal troubles.

These came out of him as naturally as his pale, thin back out of the white smock. They were not unlike Miss Wilmott's own troubles, at least his implicit ones. They had to do with Suzanne, his tall, expert-dancer of a wife, who'd left him last June to live with the Bank Building florist, Mr. Consolo, but who still somehow or other extracted money from him, though they had no child to support. Which led to another trouble: here he was, forty-two years old, the only fellow he knew who had no children, as well as the only one who had to spend half his time looking for girls with whom to dance the samba and the twist, though he had a perfectly good dancing wife of his own. The implicit troubles were, she knew, those for which she had female equivalents.

It was her early insight into their equivalence that made her think that Dr. Hobbie could help her with more than her teeth. He wasn't the world's most attractive man, not even the most attractive she'd known, which said a great deal; for her timid six feet, popped eyes and no-nose face—she'd overheard someone say she looked as if she'd been blotted—were no powerful magnet for men,

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In her entire life, there were very few times she'd gone out with half-decent men. She'd come to think that perhaps it didn't matter, that she could make it without a man. If only people would stop pressuring her. Thousands of small pressures: salesgirls calling her Mrs. when she bought her father's birthday shirts; people being introduced to her at parties; being the extra girl and getting tied up with the miserable extra man, more miserable when he saw her; the hundreds and hundreds of self-pitying hours in her two rooms, Jack Paar jabbering maniacally on the twelve-inch screen while she shared him with *Middlemarch,* its pages stained with the peanut butter she sometimes supposed was more faithful to her than any person on earth.

She had yens, God knows, though not as many as two-bit Freudians would think. She'd even had a little experience, a summer at Truro where her six feet and impressive learning had substituted for a movie star's chest and model's face. There'd even been a marriage proposal, from a Wyoming historian at the American Historical meetings in '58. It turned out that he wanted introductions to the scholarly Big Chiefs at Chicago. At least, though, it was on the books, her chance at the middle-class nirvana.

As Hobbie's big-beaked, sandy face, a good-hearted parrot's, leaned over her open mouth, even that first day, Miss Wilmott felt a kind of root tremble in her heart. A sweet man, a poor troubled fellow. Not a cretin either, though naive and uncultured. In dentistry, he was actually a scholar, full of the history of instruments, surgical procedures, technical advances. He spent weekends reading the journals, and while Dr. Grant was in A.D.A. executive sessions, he listened to papers. He was so enamored of his profession that she began to pick up toothy tidbits for him, things she'd come upon in her ubiquitous browsing in the stacks.

"Ever read ahhh Poe's Ber-ahhh-niece?"

"Nope. Spit out, Miss Wilmott."

Then, after rinsing with the sweet, violet water, "It's about a man so insanely fond of teeth that he breaks open his former fiancée's grave ahhh, pulls out all her teeth ahhh and keeps them in a box."

"Oh, my Lord," eyes furry with astonishment. "And I thought I liked teeth. Little wider there, Miss Double-U."

Miss Wilmott read the *Britannica* on Teeth and Dentistry, soaked

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up tooth lore, began to think in tooth metaphors, and felt the root tremble in her heart whenever Dr. Hobbie leaned over to pass a steel shaft beneath her strong, white crowns. "There's a tribe called the Ndembu in Rhodesia which has a tooth ceremony called the Ihamba, ahhh. They pull out the premolar incisor and their troubles are supposed to come out with it. Then they have a tooth dance."

"That's really something. Not much longer now. Good girl. Where do you find such things out?"

She puffed her cheeks with the violet water and spat as daintily as possible into the bowl's soft whirlpool. "Periodicals."

"Periodicals?"

"Magazines. That was in the ahhh *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* last month." Into her mouth and out, a silvery tool. "Dahhhhh."

"Just a little bit more now. There we are, almost out. I envy you book people. Myself, I can't . . . here we are," holding up an enamel needle bloodied with nerved dentine. "That's the old trouble maker. I think you're going to be all right for a while now."

"I might as well get everything cleaned up, Dr. Hobbie. As long as I'm making real progress. I'd miss my visit anyway."

With the hand that held the silver forceps in which her trouble-maker lay, he brushed the soft tip of his beak back and forth, as if to sniff out a proper response. "Might work a little on that back bite then if you really want to go ahead and spend the money. It'll run you thirteen, fourteen dollars." He opened the child's notebook in which he entered all appointments and payments. "That'll be three-fifty today, and we'll set you down for next Thursday. Four-fifteen, o.k., right after Mr. Givens. He's my other book patient."

Thursday, she came a few minutes early and sat on the kitchen chair listening to Dr. Hobbie tell Mr. Givens that he had this fine teacher from the University coming right in, he wanted Mr. Givens to meet her.

At 4:14 the door opened, you never had to wait, and a short, good-looking Negro of forty, dressed in house painter's stained coveralls, was introduced to her by Dr. Hobbie and said he was very glad to meet her, was she a Marxist like the other teachers up there at the University? and to her "I'm afraid not," said he was disappointed, he having been a Marxist for twenty years, the Manifester and the Working Day being his favorite books of all time.

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Dr. Hobbie's other book patient. After this, most of her appointments coincided with Mr. Givens'. She wondered if Dr. Hobbie also brought his sales people together. At any rate, she exchanged a few words each time with him while a beaming Hobbie stood by. Once she recommended Herzen's *Memoirs* to him and another time she told him that she'd just reread the Manifesto and not only the "Working Day," but the whole first book of *Capital.* At this, Mr. Givens struck a great hand to his fine brow. "You mean to say there's a whole book of that, and I don't know it? Give me the name there, Miss Wilmer. I'm ashamed of myself. I'll go git it today if I got to go to every bookstore in Chicago." Miss Wilmott gave him the name, told him it was readily available, and recommended the Everyman Library Edition, one sixty-five for each of the volumes. "God," said Mr. Givens, "they could charge three or four dollars for them, and I'd git them as quick as I'm going to now." He held out his hand, and she put her own great one into it. Dr. Hobbie said, "What'd I tell you, George?"

Today Miss Wilmott's tidbit was that biologists regarded fish teeth as migrated scales. "I suppose our ancestors may have masticated on the skins," she said, as he placed her head back into the rest.

Dr. Hobbie said that that sure would make dentistry easy. Then a large shape darkened the office door, a grey fedora pulled nose-level on the head. " 'night son," it said.

" 'night, Dad," said Dr. Hobbie.

Though she'd not seen Hobbie's father, a doctor from the floor above, she knew that the glass cabinet of unfinished bridges and tooth sets over by the television aerial was due to him, or rather to the dying patients whom he felt would be comforted by his son's diverting skill. They often died in the midst of their absorbed interest in refurbished mouths, and Miss Wilmott's Dr. Hobbie kept their work, as if, in some odd turn of the world, a mouth would appear just right for one of the unfinished bridges.

"That your father?"

"Yep. That's the old man. Been in this building since they put it up. He's a real good doctor if you need one." He was washing his hands, and she studied his reflection in the dark window. He took off his smock, and she saw his skinny, harmless back, white and pink, a rabbit scooting into a green shirt. "He helped me out with Suzanne

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last week. She hit a car. Two hundred bucks. I've got to pay her lawyer. That doesn't seem fair, does it? I mean Consolo is no poor man. They do well, even in winter. Three-fifty a dozen for irises." She put on her coat. "What do I owe you today?"

"I put my book away. I guess I can't charge you, or they'll be getting me up for not reporting income."

"I won't think of that," she said, and laid a five dollar bill on top of his sterilizer.

He took out his wallet and gave her two dollars. "I'll drive you home. It's another cold one."

"Lovely," said Miss Wilmott. She drove a '52 Pontiac which hadn't started for most of January and February.

Out on Fifty-third Street, the wind was knifed for murder. People passed like thugs, scarves pulled over mouths, hats down like old Dr. Hobbie's to the nose. Ridges of steel ice humped the streets, and every third corner had its famished crocodile of open car hood, whining for life.

"I'll offer him supper," thought Miss Wilmott, though there was nothing in the kitchen but two cans of roast beef hash, eggs, and a loaf of Pepperidge Farm Bread. Nor could she take the chance of asking him to let her shop. He'd not let himself be invited then. "I'd like to give you a little supper, Dr. Hobbie. If you're free, I mean."

"Gee."

"I don't get too many chances to cook for other people."

"That would be something, Miss Wilmott," but he was turning around, looking for something. "Darn," he said. "Guess what? I don't have the car today. It's in the garage. I am sorry, Miss Double-U, I'll put you in a cab. Let me take a raincheck on that supper, o.k.? It's real nice of you." And he opened a taxi door, put her in, spoke to the driver and said "So long." Turned out he'd paid the fare.

But Miss Wilmott had a bad night. The heat was low, her bed was cold. She got up, put on a sweater and the furry bathrobe her father'd sent her for her birthday. Feb. 2. Thirty-one. She turned on WFMT. Buzz. It was three o'clock. Dr. Hobbie'd be coming home from the Tall Girls. She sat back in the terrible green armchair she'd gotten at Carmen the Movers for eight dollars. A troglodyte.

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The only arms that ever held her. How long was it going to go on like this? She couldn't even get a man over for supper. For talk. For an exchange of troubles. The enamel crown was off, the pulp cavity cut away, and the tiny, mean, piranha nerves of the dentine sang out in the iron cold of February. Today's *Sun-Times* remarked that a marine had pole-vaulted sixteen feet, twenty years to the day after another man had pole-vaulted fifteen. A photographer, rapacious for a shot, had knocked down the bar and the record might not be official. Dr. Hobbie had said he'd come for supper, but the garage had his car. The grain of the world was wrong. What could she do? She was a Ph.D. in English history, a low-grade instructor at a high-grade university. If she wrote a few more articles and a good book, they'd give her six years an an Assistant Professor and then maybe tenure. She could get a tenure job right now at lots of women's colleges. Down south, where the streets didn't look like an illustration of the Inferno, where women were loved. But she wouldn't live down south again. She'd gone a year to W.C. in Greensboro, and she wouldn't live in a place where Mr. Givens would have to sit in the back of a bus and drink from a different water fountain. Maybe she'd go back east, nearer relatives, nearer the marrying girls of her class at Wheaton. But she'd left such dependence and such competition behind. She was a scholar. She knew her stuff. She loved to work, to find out what happened, to read two hundred-year-old periodicals, to trace in detail the rise of sentimentality, the alteration in the attitudes toward children, toward women, toward pain, toward dirt. But now, now. Tonight. She could not read, not listen to the radio, not steam a kettle. She stared at the arrested chaffinches in her stained rug border, the bricks and boards which held the books she'd dragged around for years with her, east, west, south, her swelling paunch. It was a terrible night. Only self-consciousness kept her going. She brooded on until the room turned fuzzy with fatigue and then she went off to sleep in the troglodyte's arms.

Miss Wilmott did not see Dr. Hobbie again until Spring. She was writing an article on the use of opium in England during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and it took up every minute of the time that she did not give her classes, committee

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meetings, papers, meals and pillow. Weekends, nights, vacation days found her in Harper Library or downtown at the Newberry reading account books, newspapers, doctors' diaries, the works of Coleridge, De Quincy, Bramwell Bronte and other well-known users of the drug. Her fingers bore dots of yellow where the dust of the old accounts bit into the curious, living flesh: her addiction marks. When she got to the use of opium by dental surgeons, she was brought up short.

It was May, a year from her terrible encounter with Dr. Grant. Walking home from the bus stop one evening, facing the strawberry light off the lake, she felt the root atremble in her heart. "Your liking and your lust is fresh whyle May dooth last,/When May is gone, of all the year the pleasaunt time is past." *Carpe diem,* Miss Wilmott. Old time is swiftly flying. "Oh dear," she said, taking her long, slow strides into the fading light. "It isn't simple."

But the next morning, she telephoned Dr. Hobbie and asked if she could come in to have her teeth examined. No, there was nothing special wrong except that her jaw ached when she ate ice cream, and her bite was a little unsteady. Dr. Hobbie told her to come in on Tuesday.

Monday night, he telephoned and said he was awfully sorry, he couldn't see her tomorrow. "The old man kicked the bucket today. This afternoon. I'll be real busy tomorrow. How about Friday?"

"Of course," she said, "and I'm awfully sorry about him."

"Three-thirty, right in his office." For a moment, she thought it was her appointment time, and that he was moving into his father's office. "Had his stethoscope on a patient and kicked the bucket right there, listening. Seventy-eight years old."

Miss Wilmott could not think of opium that May night. There was a burr stuck in the evening: Dr. Hobbie's mortal phrase, "Kicked the bucket." It was not worthy. Offhandedness had limits. Distaste helped blunt her disappointment at the postponement. By Thursday, however, she could hardly wait to see him.

It was ten-thirty. She must have been his first patient, for she had to wait outside the locked door. When he arrived, he said, "Don't have to work so hard now. The old man left me eighty-four thousand bucks. Never thought he was within fifty of it. Suzanne would hit the deck if she knew how much she lost out on. I'm

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going to New York, take in some shows and restaurants before she gets the word and tries to get her hands on it. I don't think she's given up on me. Every so often, she gets soused up and calls me on the phone, gives me a good chewing out. You don't do that if you've given up on somebody. Maybe you can give me a list, Miss Wilmott." A list of what—girls? "I don't know the restaurant situation too well there."

Ah. She said she knew very little about New York.

Dr. Hobbie's hands at her mouth were sure as ever, but Miss Wilmott did not feel comfortable. He talked a blue streak. "People been calling me day and night asking about the old man. They can't figure out why his phone doesn't answer. Think they'd read the papers. That's a nasty one you have back there." He touched her with a silver prong. "I'm on the run every minute. Have to shut off his phone, sub-let his office, the apartment. Papers, you have no idea, writing relatives, the funeral. Dying is harder on the relatives than the dead man. I'll bet getting born is easier. Not that I know much about that. You ever had a child, Miss Wilmott?" He'd run on too fast, and blushed. Miss Wilmott's file turned up a sentence, "A blush is a primitive erection." Her own face chugged with capillary action. "Of course not," he was saying. "Excuse me. I was just shooting off. The old man's kind of thrown me. Never had a bad word for me since I was a little tyke. Helped me through school, helped me furnish the office, helped with Suzanne." Had his old man given him the kitchen chair, the TV set, the glass case?

Miss Wilmott nearly invited him to dinner on the spot. But held back. This time she'd prepare. There'd be another appointment in a week. She'd invite him then.

Two days before the appointment she went down to Halstead Street and bought a fine roast, a Greek cheese and olives, baklava, and a beautiful egg plant which she would transform into a marvelous Greek dish she'd read about in an eighteenth century cook book. It took two days to make, and Miss Wilmott turned to it from her opium with the energetic passion she knew great cooks must have.

So there she was, the day of her appointment, ready to show her stuff. But oh how foolish was Miss Wilmott. The most untutored person would not prepare so elegantly for an empty chair. If she'd telephoned even one day early, Dr. Hobbie might have cancelled

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his plane tickets to New York; for that's where he was going, one hour and ten minutes after finishing up her mouth.

Her disappointment was immeasurable. Back she walked along Fifty-third Street, hardly looking at the colors which the sun stirred up in the chubby western clouds, hardly aware of the birds singing goodnight to her from the cottonwood as she pushed her legs past each other down Harper, Blackstone, Dorchester, Kenwood, and then up Kimbark towards her apartment.

Nor did she see Mr. Givens, the housepainter, till he was practically at her feet. "Hey there, Miss Wilmer. How ya doing this fine evening?" He'd taken off his cap, was in coveralls, and he carried a paper bag. Miss Wilmott's heart, which had jumped with fear, calmed in recognition. And then in a brilliant flash, she remembered the beautiful dinner waiting twenty feet up from where they stood. The rest was simple. "Mr. Givens, I couldn't be more happy to see anyone. Guess what just happened to me?" and she told him about someone being called away from the dinner she'd cooked, an emergency. Could he help her out and share it?

"Why Miss Wilmer, that's really something. I'm just going on up to the Blackstone Library with a couple of hamburgers and a jelly doughnut. I'm reading that Memoir book you told me about. Best thing I ever looked at. I'd like to come up, it's real nice of you. I'll read at it tomorrow night."

So Mr. Givens came and sat down at the table she'd set the night before between her green troglodyte and the TV set with her complete supply of Wedgwood picked up in the corners of State Street pawn shops and Maxwell Street stands. It was a wonderful dinner, praised by Mr. Givens as the last word in a lifetime of good eating.

He was not bad company, either. He had strong opinions about everything. There were the rich, who always argue about bills, never paid you what they'd agreed to, always trying to cut your throat; there were the sports-crazy people of Chicago, blowing off the air raid sirens when the ball team won the darn pennant; there were the "jaw-breakers" (whom she didn't identify with John Birchers till he lumped them with the Bund and the Ku Kluxers) out to loot everybody by scaring them out of their brains, not that there were too many around to be scared out of; there were these Care-

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oaches and Milers, beat writers who were full of more hot air about colored people than Talmadge and Bilbo; there was De Goal sitting up in a French cloud while everybody in Paris killed themselves with these plastic bombs; there was the Russians, more boojwa than the capitalists, never thinking beyond their own bellies, not that he should be thinking about anything else after such a wonderful meal, for which Miss Wilmer, I never will git to thank you enough.

With which he was up, a handsome man with a fine moustache, grey at the temples, a high forehead, a very distinguished-looking and intelligent self-educated man, probably unmarried, though she didn't know and wouldn't dream of asking, and if the world wasn't the way it was, and if he could possibly get interested in her, who knows if despite everything that separated them, she would not enjoy cooking for him and taking his praise and affection every single remaining evening of her life. If she could take anyone that much, there being, after all, much to be said for freedom, one's own time, doing one's own work at one's own speed, so goodnight, Mr. Givens, it's been a real pleasure, mutual, yes, some time again and I certainly would like to go out with you, no absolutely, I'm not in the least offended by the offer, I'm proud you asked me.

The next week Miss Wilmott began writing her article. It flew. Never had she written so fast, so well. In one week, she laid out a thirty-nine page first draft, and she knew that there wouldn't be more than a handful of changes. Still, she distrusted compositional euphoria, remembered Horatian maxims, and laid the article aside for a few days before turning to the final draft.

Fatal delay.

The evening Dr. Hobbie was due back from New York, she sat in the troglodyte's arms, fingering her reference cards, thinking about plunging ahead. On the very first card, the terrible equation, "Picul=133½ lbs." swooped towards her eyes. "Oh no," she said out loud. "No, no, no." But there it was. Her calculations about imports had been pegged at a hundred and sixty-six and a half pounds to the picul. She'd misread her skewered threes. An absurd error, yet an easily corrigible one. But, no, those thirty false pounds lodged in Miss Wilmott like splinters she was too fearful to dig out of her tender article. Infection set in. Her beautiful account of opium consumption, rich in psychological insight, economic analysis,

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social theory and literary allusion rose rankly to her nostrils, a festered lily.

That night her jaw throbbed in sympathetic misery. Her knowledge, her research, her opium, what were they now in the dark, stranded by her needs, errors, miscalculations, her muddled self-interest? In agony, Miss Wilmott reached for the phone and called Dr. Hobbie's home number. Four, five, six rings. The receiver was on its way down when she heard his "Hallo."

"Oh Dr. Hobbie. Thank goodness. Forgive me for calling you. I wasn't even sure you were back. It's Miss Wilmott. I'm in awful pain."

It was right to call him, said Dr. Hobbie, he'd just gotten in, he was barely asleep. He'd meet her in twenty minutes at the office, no, better, he'd pick her up in fifteen minutes. Yawn. That too quick?

"I don't want you to have to do that. I'm just being nervous. It probably was knowing that you'd come back that made me tooth-conscious. If you were in New York, I probably wouldn't have noticed."

"We'll take a look anyway, Ethel. See you in a few minutes. Bye now." Click.

He'd called her Ethel. Bye now. Bye now. By now he was taking pajamas off his long, pale body, slipping into underwear, pants, shirt.

She dressed in a flash, a blue cotton with her initials figured in the lapel, EAW, an unfinished word. Downstairs, she waited at the door, her nose blob flattened further against the glass, waiting. The first car brought her out to the stoop, but though it paused in mid-career, it was not Hobbie, and went on. Few neutral cars would stop for Miss Wilmott.

There was a bite to the air. Miss Wilmott was starting up the stairs for a sweater when Dr. Hobbie's open Dodge pulled up in front of the house. She ran down and climbed in beside him. Oh, how gay she felt. "It's wonderful of you to do this."

Behind his glasses, beaked the soft face. "I'm kind of proud to get a night call. Doesn't happen more than twice a year. Makes me feel like the old man."

Suddenly, Miss Wilmott was in a stew: there was not a splinter of pain left in her body. Nothing. Yet it had been genuine. Her whole head had gone out on strike with pain. There was no question

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of that. There may have been a psychic trigger, but the somatic twinges were genuine. Now there was absolutely nothing. Could it be that sitting beside this gentle fool, this *beau sabreur de la bouche,* was enough to soothe her uproarious gums?

At the Bank Building, all was dark. Dr. Hobbie's keys got them into the elevator and his office. He lit up his little workshop of analgesia, put a smock over his short-sleeved shirt, flipped a few switches, and before she'd summoned the strength to tell him how fine she felt, he'd sat her in the chair and stared into her mouth. "Whew. Good you called me. This must have been killing you. Can't remember a worse-looking abcess. We'll lance it and see what we can do."

Sir Percival. He was over her, touching, spearing, dabbing, in-and-out of her mouth, his beaky head swimming in a kind blue light. There was music—the hi-fi—"Is It True What They Say About Dixie?" Time flew. It was bitter dark, bitter cold, the iron February cold; she was lying down, face up, staring at the wicked ice smothering the earth. Above her head, the whacking, cracking blade opened up the ice. Hobbie's terrible lit face, a starving bird's, gleamed in the white air. His talons, fierce Swedish tools, reached for her mouth. "Berenice," he screamed, "Berenice." And out, out they came, one by one, her thirty glorious crowns, roots, rapt from her yielding jaws. Oh it was over. She lay back, vacant, depleted, fulfilled.

Dr. Hobbie leaned over, a bloody three-pronged crown caught in his silver forceps. "There's your trouble-maker. He won't bother you ever again. How do you feel, Ethel?"

She nodded. Her face felt shot away by the novocaine. The nod was like shifting a boulder.

"We'll pick up a little pain-killer and chloroseptic for you, and I'll take you home."

She raised his good dentist's hand and patted it for thanks. For more than thanks.

In the car, she asked him if he'd seen some good shows.

"Not a one. Went dancing most of the time. Those places that sell you tickets. They're not bad. You get some fine dancers. And then last Saturday who showed up at the hotel but old Suzanne. I knew she'd smell out the old man's dough."

It was wickedly dark out. They were on Cottage Grove, a five-

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mile corridor of passive malfunction. The May night blew cold on Miss Wilmott's brow. Struggling through the rocky, cotton-lined resistance in her mouth, she said, "Well, well. And what did you do?"

What a question, Miss Wilmott! Where do you come off to ask such a question?

"She's not so bad, Ethel. You get used to a certain person, and then you take her faults with her better parts. Flags." Indeed there were, on stores. "Decoration Day."

"When May is gone, of all the year the pleasant time is past," said Miss Wilmott.

"I like June," said Dr. Hobbie. "I was born in June. I graduated in June. I got married in June. Of course, Suzanne ran off to Consolo last June. Every month has its good and bad times."

They were outside the drugstore. He ran in, and she waited alone in the car, her head back on the seat, aching.

"I don't have my purse," she said when he came back.

"Forget it," he said, and put the package in her lap. "They give it to me cut-rate. I'll stick you next time."

Oh stick me now. Never, never. Her great head leaned against his shoulder and without warning, large tears bloomed and fell in her face. "Oh dear," she said.

Dr. Hobbie took his hands off the steering wheel and put them around her. "That's all right, Ethel. Just what you're supposed to do after an operation. You're going to be o.k."

She was not going to be o.k. The Ndembu's troubles left them when their teeth were pulled; not hers. The Ndembu danced to celebrate; Dr. Hobbie had not taught her the twist.

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Richard Ellmann

ROMANTIC PANTOMIME IN OSCAR WILDE

The disrepute into which estheticism fell at the end of the nineteenth century did not lose Oscar Wilde his favorite audience of the young, even in this country. For a time the First World War countered his tenets by discrediting graceful communication and by causing artists to stop using the word art. It seemed that the ambiance of truth must properly be crude and inarticulate: style consisted in laying hold of the aptest monosyllables. Today passionate muteness has in its turn become stale, and the verbal dexterity of Wilde reasserts itself, as if minds had begun to long for such pontifical impudence. Rupert Hart-Davis's splendid edition of Wilde's letters and new books on Lord Alfred Douglas, Ada Leverson, and John Gray, indicate a renewed interest in Wilde as a man, while the production of *Lady Windermere's Fan* this spring in Moscow, and of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in Paris, confirm that his comedies transcend class, fashion, and nation. He is likely to remain the one writer of the nineties whom everyone reads or, more precisely, has read.

Some of his persistent interest lies in a characteristic that, along with his girth, he shares with Dr. Johnson: he was greater than any of his works, and occupies, as he himself insisted, a "symbolical" relation to his age. He was highly conscious of living at the end of the nineteenth century rather than at its beginnings, and he emphasized directly or by implication what he held to be his differences from his predecessors. He complained that Byron, for example, was too much involved with the passions. He enforced that particular contrast by declaring in a letter that in the late Victorian age it is the scabbard which wears out the sword. If the early romantics had

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celebrated nature, Wilde, as a late romantic, deplored it. "A sunset is no doubt a beautiful thing," he said, "but perhaps its chief use is to illustrate quotations from the English poets." And he remarked that Wordsworth "found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there." He said to a friend, "Nature is a foolish place to look for inspiration in, but a charming one in which to forget one ever had any."

The early romantics had upheld simplicity and directness as virtues; Wilde declared these were not essential, and indicated his own preference for complexity and even obscurity. "Our Art is of the Moon and plays with shadows," he said with approval; he followed Verlaine in calling for nuances, and in expressing distaste for clear statement as for brute fact. The world of human experience had palled, he decided, by the end of the century: "Life," Wilde remarked, "is a great disappointment." (He had said the same of the Atlantic Ocean and of Niagara Falls.) The point was not to live life but to play with it: "It is more difficult to tell about a thing than to do it." The early romantics could still be aroused by heroic action, but Wilde felt that action is useless or, if not useless, vulgar, and that one's hopes for its outcome must almost certainly be dashed. Therefore he had no heroes in the traditional sense: "The one person who has more illusions than the dreamer," he said, "is the man of action. He, indeed, knows neither the origin of his deeds nor their results." Wilde's hero was not Prometheus but the dandy, Algernon Moncrieff, who prefered lying down to standing up, and whose most disastrous passion was for cucumber sandwiches. Even when Wilde advocated socialism he did so on the ingeniously antisocial grounds that socialism will free us of the tedious responsibility of looking after other people and enable us to worry only about ourselves. If Blake considered his enemies wicked, Wilde found his to be absurd. If Byron had a dreadful secret which he could not talk about, Wilde had a secret he was always talking about. By such broad and jaunty gestures he attempted to formulate his own place.

Wilde could not fully understand his relation to his age, though he perceived very early that he had one, because he never learned to estimate either his powers or his desires accurately even in the period when he supposed he had become humble. In a lofty passage

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in *De Profundis* he asserted, "The gods had given me almost everything," and rather glibly listed the extensive benefactions which he thought he was ashamed to have wasted: "I had a genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliance, intellectual daring; I made art a philosophy and philosophy an art; I altered the minds of men and the colours of things; there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder. I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or sonnet; at the same time I widened its range and enriched its characterization. Drama, novel, poem in prose, poem in rhyme, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched, I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me. I summed up all systems in a phrase and all existence in an epigram." The listing in this *mea culpa* is too long, but while it may have its bravura, it cannot be brushed aside as simple vanity. Once Wilde had fallen, he determined to make the best of his fall; he had to fall harder and farther than he had in reality done, like some classic example of overweening pride.

The talents that Wilde did in fact possess were more limited in number, and they were bestowed upon him equivocally. His wit, it was decreed, should not content him; he should pursue beauty and confuse it with garishness, strong adjectives followed by weak nouns; he should require social acceptance for the flowering of his nature, and be ostracized. Yet in that smashup of his fortunes, rather than at their apogee, Wilde's true position appeared. "Why is it that one runs to one's ruin?" he wondered afterwards. He toyed with being the scapegoat of his age, he dangled his legs over the edge, and eventually he found himself falling. He brooded for a year over the possibility of bringing suit against Queensberry; when at last he did, his casuistic position was to pretend he was a conformist, though he was not, and in two subsequent trials he continued in playacting under successively grimmer conditions. He wrote later, "The one disgraceful, unpardonable, and to all time contemptible action of my life was to allow myself to appeal to

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society for help and protection." But this act was fully in character, as will become apparent. Even Wilde's offense seems symbolic in this way: the pertinent point about homosexuality is that it is not a crime at all, while the point about Byron's incest, if we take that as the symbolic crime of the early part of the century, is that it is almost always and everywhere a crime.

All Wilde's discussion of homosexuality suffers from sentimentality. Though he tries to relate it to his general sense of guilt at having been undisciplined, he cannot come to grips with it in moral terms. That is why *De Profundis,* when read in its censored version, is like a stage confession, and when read in its totality (in Hart-Davis's edition), is chiefly an exposure of another man's faults. As Wilde says to Lord Alfred Douglas, to whom it is addressed, "I blame myself for the entire ethical degradation I allowed you to bring on me." (To Robert Ross he wrote, "I admit I lost my head. I let him do what he wanted.") Yet even this confession ends in a proposal that, almost as soon as Wilde is released from prison, they should meet. Wilde's real view of his offense was quite different from the judicial point of view of his time, but he could never bring himself to say so in print, and the principle of sexual freedom, which has been maintained by others with some moral grandeur, as he knew, is never expressed in his writings. At his trial he made his famous defense of the friendship of old men and young, with Greek examples (though *Dorian Gray* moralized an opposite view), but in the context of his own relations with boys at a male brothel this was appealing to courtly love as a defense of whoring.

Wilde was reluctant to try to stop people from regarding him as a sinner; it was a kind of reputation he had enjoyed from the time his first poems appeared, when respected citizens like Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson of Boston complained in the press that they were indecent, a distinction they could not really claim. So far from curbing this talk about himself, Wilde assisted it; he surprised André Gide by the open imprudence of his behavior in Algiers in 1891, he wrote his interpretation of Shakespeare's friendship with Mr. W. H. and published it when it was bound to add to the talk about him, and he surrounded Dorian Gray with the atmosphere of unmentionable acts. So we are obliged to say that the role of public sinner was one that Wilde had for a long time aspired to

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fill, although he did not wish to be taken altogether seriously at it. Sometimes he thought of his character as a palimpsest, with perversity scrawled over a fine original manuscript; as he said in the sonnet "Hélas," there had been a time when he possessed "ancient wisdom and austere control," but he had sacrified them to become "a stringed lute upon which all winds can play." (In a letter written when he was twenty-three, he said, "I shift with every breath of wind and am weaker and more self-deceiving than ever.") In this image, the Aeolian harp, which for the romantic poets was in tune with nature, is in tune only with man's baser nature. Actually he had never possessed either ancient wisdom or austere control, nor had he ever been an Aeolian harp, for the capacity for self-surrender (as opposed to wobbling) was one he did not possess. The magazine *Punch* complained early in his career, "His name is Wilde, but his poetry's tame." In pederasty he was polite, in self-immolation he was impudent. Wilde liked to think of women as sphinxes without secrets, of certain friends as egoists without egos, and so on, but this sense of the flawed surface of others came from his being, himself, a romantic without full conviction. Rousseau described in his *Confessions* real faults for which he felt real remorse, but Wilde never particularizes his offenses, as if individual acts (except when committed by Lord Alfred Douglas) had no importance in themselves, and he so empurples both his sense of guilt and his sense of repentance that they lose reality.

Instead of becoming the scapegoat of his age, he became, somewhat involuntarily, his own scapegoat. He wished to betray himself, but only a little, to destroy himself, but only a part. The role of victim—Sebastian or Marsyas—was one among several, including the dandy and the apostle of joy, that he aspired to play through. In his early flirtation with Catholicism, he wrote a friend that he would go to call on Newman "to burn my fingers a little more." He half enticed the age to crucify him, half lost his nerve in the process, meaning or almost meaning to pull back at the last. But the age was unexpectedly eager (like most ages), and the right to choose left him before he had time to exercise it. So he emulated his father's disgrace, exceeded it even, and fulfilled his own half-wish, no less felt for being passive and scarcely conscious, to kill the success he loved but secretly impugned. It would be wrong to

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assume that this image of destroying the object of affection came to him only after his fall, to be expressed in "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." In that poem the act of killing what we love is made largely deliberate, as it is also in *Salome,* written in 1893; but in other works Wilde, like his Lord Arthur Savile, blamed fate rather than volition. In a poem written about 1880, "Humanitad," Wilde declared that we are by nature our own enemies, that we are both Judas and Christ, "the lips betraying and the life betrayed." The same mixture of flaunting and fleeing appears in his conduct after he was found guilty; there was time to escape to France, and his friends urged him to go, but Wilde could not decide, and the half-packed suitcase which the police found when they arrested him is a kind of emblem of his state of mind. Wilde thought he detected a similarity to himself in Hamlet, and his interpretation of Shakespeare's play is very much in character; for Wilde Hamlet is a man who spies on his own actions, who instead of trying to be "the hero of his own history wishes to be the spectator of his own tragedy." Yet when all is said about the cross-cutting of Wilde's impulses, the force of his personality (before prison life eroded away half of it) was such that the spiteful age seems to be immolated with him, and one's first association with that trying literary period is always Wilde, pulpy, brilliant, will-less.

To read him today is to become aware in all his writing of that hesitating, much-braked momentum which leads him towards his pathetic fall. There is a certain trepidation mixed with the gay versatility that samples all the literary forms in turn, not only those he listed in *De Profundis* but others as well—fairy tales, a novel, a play in French, a confession. He is apt to use the same witty remarks in different works, as if fearful he will lose his audience without them, and aware that they will cover over deficiencies of plot for the time being at least. In characterization he is only a little interested, though he contributes a splendid character to English comedy in the lounger who appears in most of his plays and in his novel. As for the wit itself, its balance seems more hazardously maintained than we had thought; and while it pretends such arrogance, it seeks with a nervous humility to please us. Wilde is not without affection for the conventions he jocularly throws down; after he leaves the room, as he knows, they will be put back in their place;

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and Shaw was right in saying that Wilde's unconventionality was "the pedantry of conventionality." Wilde develops the theme that the artist is at war with society, and goes on a lecture tour—and to America—to win society's applause for it. The amiability of his wit is admirable; his friends regarded it as one of his greatest virtues and it is so; of all writers, Wilde was probably the best company. But Whistler had a rancorous insight when he perceived that even kindness had a weak point, a vulnerable man's unwillingness to take the button off the foil.

Regarded more justly, this amiability came both from his temperament and from his convictions. He sensed that a perfervid romanticism was out of date, and he was glad to summon up paradoxes, akin to those Blake wrote down with indignation, in startlingly good humor. Wilde said in Paris later that Napoleon was greater at St. Helena than he had been at Austerlitz, that in fact St. Helena was the greatest subject in the world; he meant that defeated exile was, for a writer as for a general, a greater theme than war. Direct combat never attracted him. He was quick to declare that Shelley was too rebellious, and his own "Sonnet to Liberty," composed at an age (twenty-five) when he might have been expected to be rash, is closely hedged: it derides those who seek liberty more than it praises them, and ends with the equivocal comment, "And yet, / Those Christs that die upon the barricades, / God knows it I am with them, in some things." He is attracted by the wildness of their self-sacrifice in part because it outdoes his own. Their image fascinates him, as did the image of Christ, not as has been said because he fancies himself to be Christ, but because he knows he is not Christ, he knows he will flub his own martyrdom.

The "Sonnet to Liberty" is a rather brief tribute after the odes to liberty written earlier in the century, and it must be the only poem on this subject written during these hundred years which ends so discreetly. Yet when Wilde was asked in San Francisco if it represented his political creed, he said no and blamed it on "the fire of youth." The same embarrassment appears in Wilde's first play, *Vera*, where the heroine, who is a nihilist, proves in the end to be more sympathetic to benevolent despotism than to democracy. Instead of assassinating the Czar she kills herself and cries that in so doing she has saved Russia. The young hero in Wilde's verse play,

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The Duchess of Padua, experiences a similar change of heart. When he learns that his father has been killed by the Duke of Padua, he agrees at once to kill the duke. But at the last moment he shies away from murder, and, with extraordinary love of verbal techniques, simply leaves his victim a letter urging him to repent.

Much as Wilde liked to think of himself as a creature overcome by passion, he was not capable of so unmitigated an energy, and his preference for characters who generously pull back from violence at the last moment suggests again how full he was of checks, of rivulets rather than rivers of emotional force. In his Newdigate prize poem, "Ravenna," he notes that Ravenna has shown little interest in her own emancipation, and tells the city not to wake from her slumbers; it is enough that she rests there mocking all human greatness. Next, as if to satisfy both worlds, he says the city may yet wake. Then all verges off into dreamy contemplation. Wilde's conscious rebellion was only against dullness, a quality shared without partisanship by both conservatives and liberals. The only weapon he cared to use against them was wit, anger being something for old men, not young. Even the rigidity of old age is tolerable because it is funny, and Wilde makes no effort to do more than point it out as preposterous. His model was a young rebel who could keep his friends and be invited to dinner parties.

For Wilde, in fact, wit became a dandyism of the mind, his special form to go with that other dandyism he so much admired and imitated, the cadenced prose of Newman and Pater. His attempts to copy their styles were unsuccessful because lacking in subtlety. He is hypnotized by words of color like "white" or "purple" (he wrote a woman poet that even Keats would have envied her the phrase "purple barge in purple shadow on the seas"), by vaguely sinister words like "strange," "curious," or "monstrous." Expressions already given up as dated by poets he adopts for his prose without a scruple, and when he is not turning clichés upon their heads he is apt to be indulging in them without irony, as if to go the romantic poets, and even the Victorians, one better. Wilde's serious conception of beauty always betrayed him; he was at his worst in delineating his only ideal. Walt Whitman had told him as much in Camden in 1882 when he countered Wilde's talk of beauty with the businesslike comment that "beauty is a result, not an abstraction."

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Wilde's mildly shocking epigrams are much better than his strained adjectives; they are harder to come by, and they are meant to leave the audience somewhat unconvinced, arrested by their wittiness more than by their credibility. That they could be expressed at all is the marvel, and their very frivolity becomes almost an independent form of art by implying that every home truth is so largely false, and that its opposite, if not precisely true, is at least merrily discomfiting. Yet there is another attraction of those epigrams such as "I can resist anything but temptation," or "It is perfectly monstrous the way people go about nowadays saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true," or "To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness," or "To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance," or "The Bible is a book that has done so much harm that I despair of doing anything to equal it." We feel in them the rhythms of reassuring platitudes, of proverbial certainties, and cutting across them the intransigences of individual thought. We have the pleasure of affirming the *ancien régime* and of rebelling against it at the same time. Long live the king, we cry, as we cut off his head. Wilde was candid enough in one of his essays, "The Truth of Masks," where he admitted to exaggerating his position deliberately so as to develop an "artistic standpoint" "with much of which," he said, "I entirely disagree," and presumably anticipated others would also. This was not just a debater's trick to quiet critics. "A truth in art," he said in more profound self-justification, "is that whose contrary is also true." The doctrine is adapted from Blake, for whom the battle of contraries was much more deeply rooted and ferociously felt, but it was pertinent enough to Wilde because art had become for him a network of encounters between dead platitudes and the resuscitating artist. To be always taking standpoints without steady conviction may however become uncomfortable, and Wilde may well have committed himself to socialism, on very much of his own terms, in an attempt to possess more completely his own soul.

Even the exaggerations in Wilde's essays have since his death come to seem more characteristic and less wilful. The doctrines of estheticism as he formulated them are more than clever overstatements of his school. They stem from need as well as caprice, for they constitute an exoneration. To consider life wasteful and disorderly

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is nothing new, but to go on to disengage the artist utterly from life, to make him omnipotent, imperturbable, divinely free, is to evolve not an esthetic theory but an image of regeneration. Assumptions which are usefully comic Wilde tries to shape into a half-serious esthetic; all that is real is obnoxious and ugly; insincerity improves upon sincerity, lies upon repulsive truth; to brush aside the circumstances of one's life is to become pure. We put on our masks (and Wilde was the first writer in English to dwell upon the truth of masks) to be absolved of an unbearable burden, our lives. "In so vulgar an age as this we all need masks," he writes in a letter of 1894. "The only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us," Wilde had himself say and would like himself to believe. This desire to be insulated from real emotion, this nostalgia for aplomb, levels life into whatever we have contempt for or anxiety about, and makes art the place where our thin skins turn to marble.

Wilde's discovery of the mask reflected in part his uneasiness with his private life, and it also brought into England, in portable though misleading form, the *symboliste* doctrine that the artist approaches the real world as circuitously as a detective attempting to piece together from inadequate evidence an almost unfathomable crime. The doctrine reaches a subtler exposition in Wilde's younger compatriot, Yeats, who perceived that the mask was a useful figure for the way the mind constantly transforms its atmosphere and is itself altered, in a reciprocal process of conversion. In Wilde's more simplified form, the interest does not lie in the esthetic theory, which is perhaps no more than a taste for varied self-expression with hieratic sanction, but rather in that for him the doctrine of the mask is itself a mask. His theme is not as he supposes the divorce of art from life, but its inescapable arraignment by experience in spite of all those witty protests he makes, in full awareness of their futility.

Wilde's creative works almost invariably end in a ceremonial unmasking, though in his late romantic and indulgent way the ceremony usually is not open to the general public and takes place before only one or two persons. The Ideal Husband admits to being as frail as the next man, and acknowledges that his political position was gained by divulging an official secret. The respectable Lady Windermere recognizes, as she recovers her incriminating fan, that

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she is as frail as the next woman, and owes her rescue to a person whom she had once felt free to despise. Dorian Gray deprives himself of his painted concealment. Wilde liked to confuse the issue by repeating that he had treated life itself as the supreme mode of fiction, but it was the destruction of this mode that animated his creative writings. The hand that languidly holds the lily suddenly shakes an admonitory finger, just when we had forgotten that admonitions could exist. The ultimate virtue in Wilde's essays is pretense, but the dénouement of his dramas and narratives, no matter from what varied sources he borrows their plots, is always the same: pretense is let go.

From this point of view his wit can be regarded as essential to his personality rather than as one of its decorative flourishes. Wilde, it is true, made out in *De Profundis* that his taste for perversity in passion was like his taste for paradox in the sphere of thought, but as with all his confessions, those social acts close to pantomime, this one was too easy. The essence of his wit is that it is a shrinkage of fat truths, a constant ripping away of society's masks. If the exposure is never reduced to seriousness, that is because the reader must be titillated with hyperbole, not faced down with grave rebuttals. "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." is a good example of an epigram writ large. The old theory that Shakespeare loved Willie Hughes is put forward, accepted, rejected, and half-accepted again by three characters. Each of the characters is to some extent an imposter. The narrative becomes a Gidian mystification. Every fraud leads to exposure, but a little fraud is still left over, just as in *Lady Windermere's Fan* a succession of harmless new lies cover up the discovery of old ones. The lid is put on the jack-in-the-box only to have him jump up again, and the last remark of the narrator, who has found a new fraud in the previous witnesses, is "But sometimes . . . I think that there is really a great deal to be said for the Willie Hughes theory of Shakespeare's Sonnets." The naked truth still eludes us, but several layers of falsehood have been stripped away.

Exposure or usually near-exposure is always the focal point in Wilde's plays. We burn to show what we are. *Salome* derives its weird power from Wilde's circling about the maskless truth as his heroine dances about Jokanaan's head. Salome strips the veils from

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her body, and all semblance of restraint from her mind, so that the play ends in open lust except that this is always viewed in archaic, ritualized terms (adapted later by Yeats), and that its object is a saint remote at the bottom of a well or later his trunkless head. Wilde's greatest work, *The Importance of Being Earnest*—the only one of his creative writings where the tension of an epigram is sustained throughout—has the same note in a lower octave: Bunbury and Uncle Ernest, those delightful exercises in self-projection and self-concealment, must die. Frivolous Jack, if he would flutter the ladies, must be Ernest at the last. Even Prism is exposed. It is easy to guess what effort to free himself lay behind this recurrent and dominating interest on the part of Wilde's characters in giving themselves away. In fact, Wilde's urge to play at confessing seems so overpowering that the Marquis of Queensberry, instead of being his villain, appears in retrospect as the agent who made up Wilde's mind when Wilde intended never quite to make it up.

To bring imposture to a crisis, Wilde has to attribute to each of his characters some secret crime which he can then live down for a while only to have it finally discovered. He dignified this pretense of social innocence in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by making it a kind of Faustian pact, complete with a Gretchen for Dorian to betray, and Dorian sells his soul not to the devil but, in the ambiguous form of his portrait, to art. In Wilde's rather simple-minded method of composition by contrasts, Dorian is countered by Sybil Vane, whose offense—the one which loses her Dorian's love—is to give herself to life rather than to art. She becomes as much in love as Juliet and so cannot act the part on the stage, for to feel a part too deeply is to become, in the eyes of others, histrionic. Mastery on the stage, as in life, consists in not feeling too much too crudely. Then Lord Henry is in a somewhat malign fashion on the side of art, holding that it is disengagement, while Basil Hallward, though a painter himself, is on the side of life, and feels that a painter must necessarily be absorbed into his painting, Dorian, falling under Lord Henry's Mephistophelean tutelage, takes seriously what Lord Henry takes lightly, shares Wilde's too often stated preference for art over life, and of course comes to grief with it. Estheticism, embraced as a new gospel, becomes diabolical, just as life, seen as all in all, becomes boring. Wilde recognized something defective in es-

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theticism, just as he half-accepted the world's ambivalent pleasure in his own wit by putting his best remarks into the mouths of his most sinister characters. Perhaps he dimly perceived that the force of his work might ultimately lie in the attempt of his heroes to make their lives into masquerades, only to be found out, in his own passion for art as a deception which penetrates a fraud. He did not, of course, give up his wit, except in *Salome,* where the Biblical prose and the use of French become an overblown substitute for it and another revamping of old rhythms. His story, "Lord Alfred Savile's Crime,"—in which the young man, informed by a fortune-teller he will kill somebody, tries unsuccessfully to murder several relatives and finally, to make the prophecy good, kills the fortune-teller—is a parody of Wilde's own conscious sense of guilt as something to fill the mind almost as ornamentation. Sometimes his characters, in their zeal to confess, confess crimes they have not committed, like the young man in *The Duchess of Padua* or Mrs. Erlynn in *Lady Windermere's Fan.* But whatever they confess, confess they must.

In self-abasement they are usually rescued with fairy-tale speed and indulgence. Wilde cancelled his nightmare of being found out with lighthearted dreams of pardon and transfiguration. After being crucified, he says in the poem "Humanitad," we shall be whole again. In his best comedies, where he is most at home, he guarantees that no character will be hurt or abused or punished. The truth once out, it can be hushed up again. A Woman of No Importance finds forgiveness from her illegitimate son and his wealthy fiancée. The Ideal Husband, after a few hours of suffering, enters the Cabinet with honor, and we almost concede his argument, which so pleased Bernard Shaw, that it requires courage to do wrong. The king in Wilde's fairy-tale who out of sympathy for the afflicted dresses as a beggar finds that his rags are merely a disguise, since they turn to golden raiment as proof that to humble is to exalt oneself. To repudiate one's legacy, to be a foundling; to repudiate one's life, to become a prisoner; these make the spirit wealthy and earn remittance of the body's sins; they haunt Wilde's writings as they must have engrossed his thoughts, and they are experiences in actuality comparable to his dream of becoming marmorean in a work of art.

For his real self is only varnished with corruption. Like his heroes, he retains an essential innocence. We may dissimulate our

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badness but not our goodness. Tetrarch Herod is unexpectedly squeamish about deaths inflicted by others. Murderers often lose heart. Dorian Gray, after having ruined so many men and women in dreadful, undisclosed ways, cannot bear to have a hunter kill a rabbit; this tenderness, portrayed again in the fairy-tale, "The Star-Child," with the same rabbit as its illustration, is related to Dorian's remorse, which brings him back again and again to the contemplation of his sins until he cannot bear to look at them any more. But even at that stage his violent action is not to destroy himself but to get rid of his picture. It is only the image which he means to attack, and his own death is a side-effect and an unintended one. For in the pinch Dorian like Wilde is carried along to consequences he does not foresee or entirely desire.

We can be grateful for Wilde's preoccupations, since they give his wit its special quality, of surprising and undeceiving without dislodging us, and since they agitate his puppet plays into vitality. Under the waving of peacock plumes, the brooding over an impossible self-immolation is always going on, whether Wilde concedes it tragically in *Salome* (though that confession is couched in French) or renders it comic in *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Always endangered, he laughs at his plight, and on his half-acquiescent way to the loss of everything jollies society for being so much harsher than he is, so much less graceful, so much less attractive. He chaffs us and asks for liking, ingratiatingly allows or half allows his errors, begs for mercy with panache. And once we have recognized that his charm is precarious, its eye on the door left open for the witless law, it becomes even more triumphant.

(This piece is part of a series of revaluations of "modern" writers. Other essays will appear in coming issues.)

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Irving Howe

LEON TROTSKY: THE COSTS OF HISTORY

Has any major figure of the twentieth century left so complete a record of his thought and experience as Leon Trotsky? Perhaps Churchill, perhaps De Gaulle; but neither of these men combined so fully or remarkably as did Trotsky the roles of historical actor and historian, political leader and theorist, charismatic orator and isolated critic. Trotsky made history, and kept an eye on history. He was a man of heroic mold, entirely committed to the life of action, but he was also an intellectual who believed in the power and purity of the word. At no point in his career, whether as a revolutionary émigré or commander of revolutionary armies, did Trotsky allow his public activities or personal condition to keep him long from his desk. "In my eyes," he once wrote, "authors, journalists and artists always stood for a world that was more attractive than any other, a world open only to the elect."

An exile in Siberia, he wrote about the 1905 Russian Revolution, the great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century, the rise of the freemasons. An exile in Europe, he wrote about the controversies of European Marxism, the special problems of Russian society, and his own theory of "permanent revolution." A leader of the Bolshevik regime, he wrote about military affairs, literary disputes, the economics of statification, manners and morals in a proletarian state, the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy. An exile in Turkey, France, Norway and finally Mexico, he wrote his monumental history of the Russian Revolution, his political autobiography, studies of Lenin and Stalin, and a stream of books, pamphlets, articles on the Chinese revolution of the late twenties, the tactics of the German Left confronting Hitler, the anatomy of the new despotism in Russia, the failure of the Popular Front in Europe, problems of political morality, the need for Marxist reconstruc-

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tion. And in 1939, when an agent of the Russian GPU drove an ax into Trotsky's skull, the murderer gained access to his victim's study on the pretext of discussing an article.

With full, almost naïve conviction Trotsky believed in the creative possibilities of the word. But he believed in them not as most Western intellectuals have: not in some ironic or contemplative or symbolic way. The common distinction between word and deed Trotsky scorned as a sign of philistinism, worthy—he might have added—of liberal professors and literary dilettantes. He regarded his outpouring of brilliant composition as the natural privilege of a thinking man, but more urgently, as the necessary work of a Marxist leader who had pledged his life to socialism. The heritage of the Russian writers of the nineteenth century is stamped upon his books, for he took from them the assumption that to write is to engage in a serious political act, a gesture toward the redemption or recreation of man.

Trotsky's life is interwoven with the complexities and tragedies of twentieth-century experience: the Marxist theoretician and scathing polemicist; the great historian; the organizer of the Bolshevik seizure of power and leader of the Red Army; the literary man devoted to the Russian classics while alert to the novelties of French prose; the defeated but unyielding critic of the Stalin dictatorship, resisting with his pen a worldwide apparatus of terror and lies; the founder of the Fourth International trying vainly, at the end of his life, to rebuild a revolutionary movement—these are but some of his public roles.

At the age of eighteen, in the tradition of sacrifice that had been established by the Russian radicals of the nineteenth century, Lev Davidovich Bronstein—as he was then called—chose the life of a professional revolutionary. What such a life could mean has been eloquently described by Edmund Wilson in *To The Finland Station*:

> Whoever has known the Russian revolutionaries of these prewar generations at their best has been impressed by the effectiveness of the Czarist regime as a training school for intellect and character in those who were engaged in opposing it. Forced to pledge for their conviction their careers and their lives, brought by the movement into contact with all classes of people, driven to settle in foreign countries whose languages

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> they readily mastered . . . —these men and women combine an unusual range of culture with an unusual range of social experience and, stripped of so many of the trimmings with which human beings have swathed themselves, have, in surviving, kept the sense of those things that are vital to the honor of human life.

In the spring of 1897 Bronstein and his friends organized a clandestine group, the South Russian Workers' Union, which held political discussions and issued leaflets about conditions in local factories; the writing and hectographing, at the rate of two hours a page, was done by Bronstein himself. Inevitably the police closed in, and early the next year most of the members of this embryonic radical movement were arrested; some were subjected to flogging and Bronstein was kept for several months in lice-ridden solitary confinement. Next he was transferred to an Odessa prison, where he remained a year and a half, and then sentenced to four years in Siberia.

But most of the important Russian Marxists were then living as exiles in Western Europe, debating their political course in relation to the seemingly invincible monolith of Czarism and preparing to establish an organization that might ensure tighter relations between themselves and the scattered illegal groups in Russia. Eager to meet and learn from such Marxist leaders as Plekhanov, Martov and Lenin, young Bronstein escaped from Siberia in the fall of 1902, made his way secretly across Russia and, taking the pseudonym by which the world came to know him, managed to smuggle himself across the frontier.

Once in Europe, Trotsky immediately threw himself into the political life of the Russian émigrés. In London he met Lenin for the first time, and the two men took long walks through the streets of the alien city, exchanging political ideas and impressions of the underground in Russia. Trotsky began to write articles for *Iskra* distinguished by revolutionary enthusiasm, but florid and immature in style: the hard aphoristic brilliance of his later prose would come only from an accumulation of experience and a conscious self-discipline. By the time the Russian Social Democratic Party held its Second Congress in 1903, Trotsky, though still in his early twenties, was a figure of some importance. He refused to align himself com-

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pletely with either of the factions that were hardening into shape, the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and the Mensheviks led by Martov. This division can now be seen as a partial anticipation of the great split that would come during the First World War between revolutionists and reformists within the socialist movement, but at the time the issues were still murky, and Trotsky, disinclined in his earlier years to tie himself to a party apparatus, sided now with one group and now with the other. At stake, apparently, was a bit of phrasing as to who could be considered a member of the party: someone who "personally participates in one of its organizations" (Lenin), or someone prepared to "cooperate personally and regularly under the guidance of one of the organizations" (Martov). Scholastic as this difference might seem—two years later the Mensheviks virtually took over Lenin's phrasing—it was nevertheless a sign of a divergence in political outlook that went deeper than the participants could yet grasp.

Immediately after the Congress Trotsky sided with the Mensheviks, composing vitriolic attacks on what he regarded as Lenin's dictatorial and "Jacobin" views concerning party organization. In a pamphlet he wrote denouncing Lenin there appeared a sentence that has since been quoted many times as a prophetic anticipation, ignored by the later Trotsky himself, of the decline of the Russian Revolution:

> Lenin's methods lead to this: the party organization at first substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organization; and finally a single "dictator" substitutes himself for the Central Committee.

The remark is a striking one, of course, in its anticipation of the ways in which the highly centralized structure of the Bolshevik party would encourage an authoritarian psychology among the leaders and intellectual dependence among the followers. As a sociological insight, it remains valuable for the study of modern politics and political organization. Yet it is hardly as prescient as some historians have supposed, and it certainly is not sufficient evidence for the claim that in his youth Trotsky grasped the causes of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution in a way that the older Trotsky, even after his downfall, refused to acknowledge. Though anticipating the debacle of the Bolshevik party in the era of Stalinist totalitarian-

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ism, Trotsky's remark does not—nor could it—touch upon the complex of causes behind that degeneration. Any effort to explain a major historical phenomenon (like the rise of Stalinism) by the workings of an exclusive cause (like Bolshevik centralization) is doomed to be superficial, and the later Trotsky was right in rejecting such a mode of explanation.

Though siding with the Mensheviks on party organization, Trotsky began, in the early years of the century, to express views on another fundamental problem—the relationship in the coming Russian Revolution between the socialist and the liberal bourgeois parties—which brought him closer to Lenin. Since, as all Russian Marxists agreed, the first task was to overthrow the Czar and establish democratic rights, the Mensheviks argued that the liberal bourgeoisie would have to take the lead and the working class serve as a loyal opposition. Trotsky, by contrast, insisted that the socialists should keep a clear distance from the bourgeois parties and not compromise with liberalism.

These discussions, apparently so academic, soon involved the destinies of millions. For the moment, however, they were happily put aside when the Russian people, long voiceless and dormant, began in 1905 to stir against the Czarist regime. In Petersburg a demonstration led by an Orthodox priest called for democratic rights; the Czar ordered his troops to fire into the crowd. From Geneva Trotsky wrote in a state of high excitement:

> One day of revolution was enough, one magnificent contact between the Czar and the people was enough for the idea of constitutional monarchy to become fantastic, doctrinaire, and disgusting. The priest Gapon rose with his idea of the monarch against the real monarch. But, as behind him there stood not monarchist liberals but revolutionary proletarians, this limited "insurrection" immediately manifested its rebellious content in barricade fighting and in the outcry: Down with the Czar. The real monarch has destroyed the idea of the monarch. . . . The revolution has come and she has put an end to our political childhood.

Throughout the year 1905 Russia was in a turmoil of rebellion. Strikes closed the factories, street demonstrations broke out in the cities, the crew of the battleship *Potemkin* revolted. One of the first

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exiles to return to Petersburg, Trotsky for a time lived a political life that was half-public, half-clandestine. Belonging to neither the Menshevik nor Bolshevik faction, but contributing frequently to the press of both and acting with a boldness neither could match, Trotsky became the popular tribune of the revolutionary left. In October there met in the capital the Soviet of Workers' Delegates—a kind of rump parliament of representatives from the unions, left parties, and popular organizations—in which Trotsky soon rose to the post of chairman. Unlike the Bolsheviks, who until Lenin's arrival in November were skeptical about the Soviet because of fear it would threaten their political identity, Trotsky grasped the enormous revolutionary potential of this new and spontaneous organ of political action. His personal fearlessness, his combination of firm political ends with tactical ingenuity, and his incomparable gifts as an orator helped transform him, at twenty-six, into a leader of the first rank: he had entered upon the stage of modern history, where he stayed until the ax of a murderer removed him. Here is a passage from one of his speeches before the Soviet, a characteristic flare of virtuosity, in which he tells about a conversation with a liberal who had urged him to moderation:

> I recalled to him an incident from the French Revolution, when the Convention voted that "the French people will not parley with the enemy on their own territory." One of the members of the Convention interrupted: "Have you signed a pact with victory?" They answered him: "No, we have signed a pact with death." Comrades, when the liberal bourgeoisie, as if boasting of its treachery, tells us: "You are alone. Do you think you can go on fighting without us? Have you signed a pact with victory?" we throw our answer in their face: "No, we have signed a pact with death."

In the fifty days of its existence the Soviet experienced the dilemma so frequently faced by revolutionary institutions: it was strong enough to frighten the government but not strong enough to overthrow it. Finally, Czarism regained the initiative, for it was not yet as fully discredited as it would be in 1917 and the revolutionary movements were still unripe and inexperienced. In the repressions that followed, thousands were killed and imprisoned; reaction once again held Russia. Together with the other leaders of the Soviet,

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Trotsky stood public trial, at the climax of which—for now he stood firm in the sense of his powers, secure in the knowledge that he had established himself in the line of the great European rebels, convinced that he had found the key to history—he made a brilliant, openly defiant speech:

> A rising of the masses is not made, gentlemen the judges. It makes itself of its own accord. It is the result of social relations and conditions and not of a scheme drawn up on paper. A popular insurrection cannot be staged. It can only be foreseen. For reasons that were as little dependent on us as on Czardom, an open conflict has become inevitable. . . .
>
> . . . no matter how important weapons may be, it is not in them, gentlemen the judges, that great power resides. No! Not the ability of the masses to kill others, but their great readiness themselves to die, this secures in the last instance the victory of the popular uprising. . . .

Again Siberia: this time deportation "for life." But it was a saving feature of pre-totalitarian despotisms that they were often inefficient, so that even before reaching his Arctic destination Trotsky could make a superbly bold escape, being driven by a vodka-besotted peasant for a whole week across the frozen tundra and through ferocious blizzards.

For the young Marxist who only a few months earlier had been sentenced to Siberia "for life," the escape was a personal triumph: in retrospect one might say, a personal triumph with historic portents. But now that he was safe again in Europe Trotsky turned back to his pen, composing his first major work, *1905*, an historical study that in scope and vigor anticipates the *History of the Russian Revolution.*

These were hard times for the Russian revolutionists. The Czar took a merciless revenge as he cut away almost every vestige of popular rights. In Russia the socialist movements came close to collapse from police harassment and inner demoralization, while in exile they kept fragmenting into embittered factions. Trotsky continued vainly to urge that the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks reunite: perhaps he did not fully grasp the extent of their disagreements, perhaps he feared what the consequence of grasping it might be.

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Wandering from country to country, often after being expelled by the police, and earning a bare living through political journalism, he found himself in New York during the war years, and there he wrote for a radical Russian paper until word of the March 1917 revolution brought him rushing back to his homeland. During the years between the two Russian revolutions Trotsky's main intellectual work was the development—and defense against critics within the movement—of his theory of permanent revolution, a bold set of speculations concerning Marxist strategy in backward countries. It may be useful here to attempt a schematic and condensed summary of this theory:

1) Czarist Russia is a backward country in which the immediate task is the bourgeois-democratic revolution that will confront those problems that, historically, have been solved by the great bourgeois revolutions of the past: such problems as the overthrow of the autocracy, the abolition of semi-feudal relations in the countryside, the right to self-determination for oppressed national minorities, the convocation of a constituent assembly to establish a republic, the proclamation of democratic liberties, etc.

2) These tasks, however, must be faced in Russia long after the bourgeoisie as a class has lost the revolutionary élan of its youth. Because of the special backwardness and isolation of Russian society, the Russian bourgeoisie is characterized by timidity and indecision. It has many social and economic reasons for opposing the Czarist autocracy, yet is bound to it by links of petty interest, prestige and cowardice. Above all, it shares with the autocracy a growing fear of the two main classes at the base of Russian society: the peasantry and the workers. Because of these congenital weaknesses, the Russian bourgeoisie is incapable of a revolutionary initiative even in behalf of its own interests; it cannot make "its own" revolution. Consequently the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in a backward country like Russia must now be fulfilled by the plebeian classes. Or to put forward a seeming paradox, the bourgeois revolution has to be made *against* the bourgeoisie.

3) While it rests with the working class and the peasantry to carry through the bourgeois revolution, these classes are not socially or historically of equal weight. The peasantry—because of its geographical dispersion, centuries-long passivity, tradition of petty ownership, and lack of common outlook—has

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shown itself incapable of taking the historical lead. Its role has always been to serve as a crucial but subordinate ally of an urban class.

4) The sole urban ally now available to the peasantry—unless it remain the collective serf of Czarism—is the proletariat. For Trotsky, then, the inevitable conclusion is that the bourgeois-democratic revolution could be completed in a backward country only under the leadership of the working class, small and inexperienced though it may be—which means more particularly, only under the leadership of the revolutionary party speaking for the working class. But the workers, having gained power, will not be able to stop short before the problems of the bourgeois revolution. The very effort to cope with these will inevitably force them to go beyond the limits of bourgeois property, so that, as Trotsky would write later, "the democratic revolution grows over immediately into the socialist, and thereby becomes a *permanent* revolution."

5) The socialist revolution thus begun in a backward country cannot be completed within national limits. For that, there would be neither a sufficiently secure economic base nor a working class sufficiently strong and conscious. Power could be held and steps toward socialism taken only if there speedily followed victorious revolutions in the advanced European countries. Russia's very backwardness would thrust her forward in the revolutionary scale and bring her under the rule of the working class, perhaps before any of those countries which, because of their economic maturity, were commonly regarded as most ripe for socialism. But this same backwardness, after having forced the working class to power, would overtake it and drag it down unless it received aid from abroad. Or as Trotsky later put it: "In a country where the proletariat has power . . . as the result of the democratic revolution, the subsequent fate of the dictatorship and socialism is not only and not so much dependent in the final analysis upon the national productive forces, as it is upon the development of the international socialist revolution."

Unquestionably this was the boldest theory, the most extreme prognosis, advanced by any Russian Marxist in the years before the first world war. The full measure of its audacity can be grasped even today by anyone who troubles to break past the special barriers of the Marxist vocabulary and examine the theory in terms of the tensions between "underdeveloped" and advanced countries in the

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twentieth century. The vexing problem of the relation between backwardness and industrialization, which today preoccupies all serious political thinkers, was to be solved, as Trotsky saw it, by the historical audacity of the barely-developed proletariat in the colonial countries. For the Mensheviks, who believed that the bourgeoisie would have to lead the forthcoming bourgeois revolution, Trotsky's theory was an absurdity. Lenin, though agreeing with Trotsky as to the historical impotence of the Russian bourgeoisie, felt that the Russian working class was still too weak and inexperienced to play the grandiose role assigned to it by Trotsky and that the revolution would have to be carried through by an alliance between proletariat and peasantry, whose exact relationship he refused to specify or predict. Later, after the Russian Revolution, Lenin acknowledged the prescience of Trotsky's theory, and in retrospect it seems no exaggeration to add that of all the Marxists it was Trotsky who best foresaw the course of events in Russia.

But not entirely. There were at least two crucial respects in which history would cross his expectations. Like most Marxists, Trotsky did not foresee the extent to which the working class in Western Europe, increasingly absorbed into national life and having won for itself major economic and political benefits, would choose parliamentarism, rather than revolution, as the way to realize its aims. The help from a victorious European proletariat which Trotsky hoped would salvage the Russian Revolution was not to be forthcoming. Secondly, he failed to anticipate certain consequences of an isolated revolution in a backward country. He knew it might collapse or be overthrown, but he did not imagine that a consolidation of power from within its ranks might undo its original values. That the working class in a backward country, or a party acting in its name, could in moments of crisis approach and even take power, but that it would then reveal a fundamental incapacity to reconstruct economic and cultural life on a level high enough for achieving socialism—all this he foresaw brilliantly. But what he did not count on was that in such a debacle the revolutionary party, or a bonapartist sector of it, would concentrate power in its upper ranks and establish itself as a bureaucratic élite above all classes—above exhausted proletariat, supine peasantry, dispersed bourgeoisie. The result would be a new, collectivist mode of authoritarianism, neither

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capitalist nor socialist in character. The first of these miscalculations did not necessarily call into question the validity of Marxism, but the second involved historical possibilities with which traditional Marxism was not well prepared to cope.

With the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Trotsky moves into the center of modern history. His achievements as revolutionary leader are sufficiently known not to require a full account in these pages, but a few details may help us in tracing the curve of his political career.

Returning to Petersburg after the overthrow of the Czar, Trotsky thrust himself into the excitements of Russian politics, a politics that was chaotic and ultimatistic but, for the first time in history, free. Parties sprang up, debate rang passionately, the long-silent masses began to find their voice. The provisional governments that had replaced the Czar—first under the liberal monarchist Prince Lvov, then the Constitutional Democrat Miliukov and finally the populist Kerensky—were inherently unstable. Their incapacity or unwillingness to permit a division of landed estates among the peasants and their failure to end Russia's participation in a fruitless and exhausting war made them increasingly unpopular. Since Trotsky opposed in principle any political collaboration with these regimes, even when they included some Menshevik ministers under Kerensky, he found himself at odds with both the Mensheviks and the "conciliationist" wing of the Bolsheviks. By the same token he was now closer to Lenin, whose entire political strategy beginning with the spring of 1917, to the astonishment even of many of his own comrades, was directed toward preparing the Bolshevik party for a seizure of power. In July Trotsky formally joined the Bolsheviks, though for some months he had already been working with them.

Supported by Lenin and for the first time in his political career working closely with a disciplined party organization, Trotsky became the popular spokesman for Bolshevism. Sukhanov, the gifted Menshevik whose eyewitness chronicle of the revolution is a major historical source, has recalled that Trotsky "spoke everywhere simultaneously. Every worker and soldier at Petrograd knew him and listened to him. His influence on the masses and the leaders alike was overwhelming." His biographer, Isaac Deutscher, offers a vivid picture of Trotsky as a mass orator:

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> . . . he established his platform in the Cirque Moderne, where almost every night he addressed enormous crowds. The amphitheatre was so densely packed that Trotsky was usually shuffled towards the platform over the heads of the audience, and from his elevation he would catch the excited eyes of the daughters of his first marriage . . . He spoke on the topics of the day and the aims of the revolution with his usual piercing logic; but he also absorbed the spirit of the crowd, its harsh sense of justice, its desire to see things in sharp and clear outline . . . Later he recollected how at the mere sight of the multitude words and arguments he had prepared well in advance receded and dispersed in his mind and other words and arguments, unexpected by himself but meeting a need in his listeners, rushed up as if from his subconscious. He then listened to his own voice as to that of a stranger, trying to keep pace with the tumultuous rush of his own ideas and phrases and afraid lest like a sleepwalker he might suddenly wake and break down. Here his politics ceased to be the distillation of individual reflection or of debates in small circles of professional politicians. He merged emotionally with the dark warm human mass in front of him . . .

Trotsky was more than a superb orator, more than a remarkably sensitive medium between the aroused masses and the straining Bolshevik leadership. In the Soviets, those improvised institutions of popular sovereignty where the left-wing parties struggled for domination, he became the main political spokesman for the Bolshevik point of view. And as preparations for the October Revolution proceeded, "all the work of practical organization of the insurrection"—even Joseph Stalin had to admit shortly afterwards—"was conducted under the immediate leadership of the President of the Petrograd Soviet, Comrade Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the Soviet, and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee [the body directing the October insurrection], the party owes principally and first of all to Comrade Trotsky."

In the government now formed under Lenin, Trotsky became foreign minister, intending, as he joked, to issue "a few revolutionary proclamations and then close shop," but in reality having to conduct the difficult Brest-Litovsk negotiations with imperial Germany, which at a heavy price brought peace to Russia. In 1918, when the

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Civil War broke out across the whole of Russia, Trotsky became Minister of War. Without military experience, he applied himself to creating a revolutionary army from almost nothing. He began with a few thousand Bolsheviks, Red Guards who had fought in the revolution; a considerable group of Russian army officers willing to serve the new regime in a nonpolitical capacity; and masses of untrained recruits who lacked discipline and often enough arms. For almost two years Trotsky lived in an armored train which served as the political-military headquarters of the new army. Moving from front to front, working with ferocious energy, exposing himself in crucial battles to rally frightened men, insisting upon the military authority of the old officers while checking their power through a network of political commissars, holding fast to standards of efficiency and discipline among soldiers who had long been demoralized, but above all else, stirring his followers to fight and die through the exaltation of his speeches and manifestoes, Trotsky created an effective army which finally defeated the Whites. He understood that in a revolutionary army it is the will to struggle which is often decisive; victory would come to his troops only as they believed themselves to be crusaders in behalf of a better world, only as they were ready to face death out of a conviction that they were—to quote from one of Trotsky's speeches to his soldiers—"participants in an unprecedented historic attempt . . . to create a new society, in which all human relations will be based on . . . cooperation and man will be man's brother, not his enemy."

Once the Red Army had ended the threat of counter-revolution, the young Bolshevik regime had for the first time to face the problems of social reconstruction. In these difficult years, when Russian economic life was reduced to chaos and hunger swept across the land, Trotsky argued in behalf of compulsory work and labor armies based on military discipline—draconian measures, he admitted, but necessary for lifting the economy to that minimal level of production where ordinary incentives might begin operating. (It is but fair to add that Trotsky advocated these measures only after his proposal for modifying "War Communism" had been rejected and that he was among the first Bolshevik leaders to urge the economic relaxation that went under the name of NEP.)

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In the public debates that followed—for a certain measure of political opposition could still be expressed in Russia—the Menshevik leader Raphael Abramovich opposed such forced labor battalions with the query: "Wherein does your socialism differ from Egyptian slavery? It was just by similar methods that the Pharaohs built the pyramids, forcing the masses to labor." Trotsky replied: "Abramovich sees no difference between the Egyptian regime and our own. He has forgotten the class nature of government. . . . It was not the Egyptian peasants who decided through their Soviets to build the pyramids . . . our compulsion is applied by a workers' and peasants' government . . ."

It was an unfortunate argument, Trotsky at his weakest. In advancing it he failed to acknowledge that by 1920 the Russian workers were not deciding very much on their own; it was the Bolshevik government that made the decisions. A great deal of the support the Bolsheviks had enjoyed among the workers since the October revolution had by now been lost or badly weakened. The policies of this government could not be justified simply because it was, or called itself, a workers' government; its rights to that title might better be justified by the nature of the policies it put forward. But most unfortunate of all, Trotsky's argument provided the formula that could later be used all too easily for rationalizing the Stalinist plunge into totalitarianism.

In arguing for labor armies and also in justifying the suppression of dissident socialist groups, Trotsky invoked the harsh necessities of fighting a desperate civil war and salvaging a collapsed economy. As he began, upon the completion of the civil war, to work at the revival of industrial production, all his enormous talents came into play; but his political role took on a harsh and authoritarian cast which cannot be justified even to the extent that certain of his measures during the civil war might be. Driven by the force of intolerable circumstances, but also trapped in the vise of a Bolshevik exclusivism which led to greater concentrations of power at the summit of the ruling party just when an opening of political and economic life might alone have saved the situation, Trotsky now condoned acts of repression which undercut the remnants of "Soviet democracy." A few years earlier the left-Menshevik leader, Julius Martov, had warned against the tendency of the Bolsheviks to

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equate the power of their party with the interests of the proletariat. Trotsky, flushed with the conquest of power, had replied: "You are bankrupt; your role is played out. Go where you belong from now on—into the rubbish-can of history!" Sad words, from the man who in a few years would himself be harried into exile; sad words, as they reflect a failure to see that it is not always the least intelligent or good or even politically "correct" who are cast into that rubbish-can.

In the years after the revolution, Lenin was more flexible, less doctrinaire than Trotsky. He opposed Trotsky's scheme for labor battalions and argued against a facile identification of the Bolshevik state with the proletariat; he described the regime as a "*deformed* workers' state" in which the workers' organization had to defend not only the state against its enemies but themselves against the state. But while this led him to propose an easing of economic life, he did not urge a parallel easing of political life. On the contrary, the turn toward the NEP in 1921, with its attendant threat to the Communist political monopoly, became for Lenin an argument against the reintroduction of even limited political freedoms.

In a speech before the Third Congress of the Comintern (1921), Lenin repeated the assumption that had been common to all the Bolshevik leaders:

> It was clear to us that without aid from the international world revolution, a victory of the proletarian revolution [in Russia] is impossible. Even prior to the Bolshevik revolution, as well as after it, we thought that the revolution would also occur either immediately or at least very soon in other backward countries and in the more highly developed capitalist countries. Otherwise we would perish.

Russia, Lenin kept insisting, was a backward peasant land that lacked technology, industry and the accumulated culture required for surpassing the achievements of the Western capitalist countries. Consequently the fate of the Russian Revolution depended on the ability of the Communist movement to achieve power in at least one major advanced country, so that assistance could come for besieged Russia. With the defeat of the 1919-1921 revolutions in Western Europe, however, there were already signs that Lenin's prophecy—"otherwise

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we perish"—would be realized. But realized in ways that neither Lenin nor Trotsky had foreseen.

The Bolshevik party could preserve itself as master of a beleaguered state within the limits of a shrunken Russia, but in doing so it underwent large transformations in political ideology, social character and moral quality. In a country where all the means of production are owned by the state, and the state is totally in the grip of the only legal party, major changes in the nature of the party are equivalent to a social revolution creating new relationships between rulers and ruled.

Both the Russian economy and the Russian people were exhausted. To prevent economic collapse or social explosion, Lenin proposed as part of the NEP major concessions to an already hostile peasantry; but this in turn helped bring into existence a whole new conservative stratum of "rich" and middle peasants. When the mass of soldiers, demobilized after the civil war, came back drained of their revolutionary or patriotic fervor, the conservative tendencies within the villages were further reinforced.

So too in the cities. The workers were sapped of their social energy, some having fallen into demoralization and others turning against the regime. Many of the most devoted Bolsheviks had died during the civil war; others had been worn out; and still others, lacking the iron will of a Lenin or a Trotsky, displayed the characteristics of officials everywhere, with vested interests of their own which set them in increasing opposition to the workers in whose name they ruled. Apart from large amounts of economic help, what the country needed most was the ventilation of ideas, a gust of freedom to bring new life and strength; but after 1921 the Bolsheviks refused to allow any party but their own to function legally and thus contributed heavily to their own degeneration. Ruling as a minority dictatorship, though at times with mass support, the Bolshevik regime had planted the seeds of counter-revolution at the very moment the revolution triumphed. Each repressive measure taken by the dictatorship, even when truly the consequence of an emergency created by civil war or economic collapse, further undermined the ideological claims to which many of its supporters were devoted and helped create within the regime a cancerous social growth flourishing upon deprivation, cynicism and brutality.

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A new social stratum—it had sprung up the very morning after the revolution—began to consolidate itself: the party-state bureaucracy which found its roots in the technical intelligentsia, the factory managers, the military officials and above all the Communist functionaries. It was narrow in outlook, provincial and boorish in tone, primitive in culture. It was committed to a nationalist perspective, and instinctively authoritarian in method. It looked upon the workers as material to be shaped, upon intellectuals as propagandists to be employed, upon the international Communist movement as an auxiliary to be exploited, and upon Marxist thought as a crude process for rationalizing its new ambitions.

To speak of a party-state bureaucracy in a country where industry has been nationalized means to speak of a new ruling group or class which parasitically fastened upon every institution of Russian life. That many members of this new party-state bureaucracy were unaware of the significance of this process seems obvious; it was, in many respects, an historical novelty for which little provision had been made in the Marxist scheme of things. Years later, in 1928, the Bolshevik leader Bukharin, who had joined with Stalin to defeat Trotsky and was then himself shattered by Stalin, remarked that the disasters of the post-revolutionary period were all due to a "single mistake": the identification of the party with the state. There were people in the "rubbish-can of history" who had been saying that for some time.

At precisely which point the revolutionary dictatorship of Leninism gave way to the totalitarianism of Stalin is hard and perhaps profitless to say. This transformation—a gradual counter-revolution—began during or shortly after the revolution itself, in the inner structure of the Leninist regime; came to its decisive moment in the mid-twenties; and reached full expression in the thirties, with the mass deportation of peasants, the Moscow trials and the blood purges. Having consolidated its power, the new bureaucratic class proceeded to exploit the opportunities for centralized economic planning that are peculiar to a nationalized economy; it undertook a "primitive accumulation of capital" so cruel and bloody as to make the earlier accumulation of bourgeois society seem a model of humaneness.

Of this whole process Trotsky was a powerful critic, from the publication in 1923 of his brochure *The New Course,* in which he

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first explored the social physiognomy of bureaucratism, to his final writings in 1940, in which he showed signs of uncertainty as to some of his earlier sociological analyses of Stalinism. But especially in the earlier critiques, Trotsky made the error of supposing that in alliance with the new conservative elements in the countryside (whose interests he saw reflected in the "Right Communist" group led by Bukharin), the bureaucracy might constitute a nucleus for the restoration of private capitalism. Actually, as it slowly gathered into its hands control of the entire state, which meant control over the socio-economic life of the nation, this new ruling stratum had every interest in preventing a return to private capitalism, for it neither owned nor could own property but instead controlled the state in whose legal custody property resided. Private capitalism would have meant the end of its power and privilege. It turned instead against every real or potential source of opposition both within and outside the party, destroying the bulk of the Bolshevik "Old Guard" in the purges of the next decades, reducing the intellectuals to a traumatized obedience, terrorizing the workers into passivity, and establishing itself as the sole center of power.

Until the late twenties, criticism of this bureaucratic trend could still be voiced in Russia, though in the later years not with impunity. Various opposition groups struggled to change the Bolshevik course between 1920 and 1923, that is, before Trotsky became the major critic of Stalinism and indeed, without his badly-needed help. One respected Bolshevik oppositionist, G. Myasnikov, wrote: "The Soviet power must maintain at its own expense a body of detractors as did once the Roman Emperors." These words went unheeded, and their author suffered rebuke from the Central Committee. The questions Trotsky would raise in his struggle against Stalinism—questions concerning revolutionary strategy abroad, economic development at home, democracy within the ruling party—were surely important; but now it seems clear that the main significance of all the opposition groups, both Trotskyist and non-Trotskyist, was as a series of ill-connected efforts to stop or slow the trend toward totalitarianism.

For some years, roughly between 1923 and 1928, Trotsky was both political leader and intellectual guide of the left opposition groups in Russia which attacked the growing despotism of the Stalin

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regime. Far more skillful as the spokesman of a revolutionary upsurge than as a factional maneuverer, painfully aware that he was caught in a moment of social retreat which must prove inhospitable to his austere demands and standards, Trotsky fought doggedly, with intellectual flair and personal pride. But he fought on the terrain of the enemy, accepting the destructive assumption of a Bolshevik monopoly of power, and there were times when he suddenly withdrew into silence and illness, as if in disgust at having to cope with the hooliganism and intellectual vulgarity of his opponents. The very aspects of post-revolutionary Russia which Trotsky saw as conducive to the rise of Stalinism—social weariness, pervasive poverty, lack of culture, asphyxiation of independent thought, loss of spirit among Bolshevik cadres learning to prefer the comforts of administration to the heroism of revolution, the decline in strength and numbers of a proletariat bled white by civil war and industrial collapse—all this made it almost inevitable that Trotsky, no matter what his tactics, would fail. Years earlier, in 1909, he had provided a vivid description of parallel circumstances:

> When the curve of historical development rises, public thinking becomes more penetrating, braver and more ingenious. . . . But when the political curve indicates a drop, public thinking succumbs to stupidity. The priceless gift of political generalization vanishes somewhere without leaving a trace. Stupidity grows in insolence and, baring its teeth, heaps insulting mockery on every attempt at a serious generalization. Feeling that it is in command of the field, it begins to resort to its own means.

Many centuries earlier Thucydides had put the matter in his own words:

> Those who enjoyed the greatest advantages were the men of limited intelligence. The consciousness of their inability and of the talent of their adversaries made them fear that they would be duped by the fine speeches or the subtlety of spirit of their enemies and therefore they advanced straight toward their aim; while the others, scorning even to foresee the schemes of their adversaries and believing that action was superfluous when talk seemed to suffice, found themselves disarmed and defeated.

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In only one way could Trotsky possibly have wrested power, and this was through a military coup taking advantage of his popularity in the army. But such a coup would have contributed to the acceleration of the very authoritarian decline he was now opposing; and in any case, he was too much a man of ideological rigor, too much a man devoted to his own sense of historical place and honor, to succumb to the smallness of a bonapartist adventure. In a bitterly ironic turn of events, he was suffering from the vindication of his own theory of permanent revolution, by means of which he had predicted that a proletarian revolution in a backward country would, if it continued to suffer isolation, find itself in an historical limbo. Only, as it happened, neither he nor anyone else could predict how terrible that limbo would be.

The programs advanced by Trotsky during these years are far too complex, and far too deeply imbedded in the historical context of the time, to allow for easy summary. In general, however, at least three major themes can be noted. To cope with the economic crisis in which Soviet Russia found itself during the early and middle twenties—what Trotsky described as the problem of "the scissors," the two blades of which, moving farther apart from one another, were the rising prices of industrial goods and the declining prices of agricultural products—the Trotskyist opposition put forward an elaborate plan for the reorganization of the economy. The goals of this plan included strengthening the "socialist" industrial sector, raising the productivity of labor, supporting the poorer peasants against the new *kulaks* who had sprung up in the countryside since the NEP, improving the living standards of the workers and drawing them into a more active role in economic life. What was needed, wrote Trotsky, was "a *socialist* accumulation of capital," an harmonious development of the various departments of industrial production, and toward this end "Soviet democracy has become an *economic* necessity." Together with his economic program, Trotsky concentrated on the problems of democracy within the Bolshevik party and the state-dominated institutions of social life:

> Free discussion within the party has in fact disappeared; the party's social mind has been choked off. In these times the broad masses of the party do not nominate and elect the provincial committees and the Central Committee. . . . On

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> the contrary, the secretarial hierarchy of the party to an ever greater degree selects the membership of conferences and congresses which to an ever greater degree are becoming executive consultations of the hierarchy.

Trotsky did not propose the restoration of freedom for the outlawed socialist parties, but confined himself to urging democracy within the Bolshevik party so that its intellectual life could be refreshed. And finally, he urged a reassertion of the principles of "socialist internationalism" in the work of the Communist parties abroad, charging that under Stalin's domination the Communist movement was being reduced to an appendage of Russian nationalism. As Trotsky saw it, the struggle between Stalin and himself was not primarily a personal dispute or a competition for power; it involved profound differences of principle between a bureaucracy that had become encrusted on the workers' state and the oppositionist forces that spoke for the socialist tradition.

Some years later, when the triumph of Stalinism had become complete in Russia and a good number of Western liberals had succumbed to an uncritical acceptance of its pretensions, it became fashionable to say that Stalin, having embarked upon a frenzied program of industrialization through his successive Five Year Plans, had "stolen Trotsky's thunder." Such remarks ignored the fact that what mattered for Trotsky was not industrialization as an end in itself but industrialization in behalf of what he took to be socialist ends. Industrialization might be effected in any backward country prepared to employ centralized power with sufficient ruthlessness in order to sweat capital accumulation out of the people, but that was not what Trotsky believed to be the issue. For him, as he kept insisting, industrialization mattered as a means for "raising the specific gravity of the proletariat in society," and thereby moving toward the harmonious world of socialism. The industrialization of Stalin, by contrast, was achieved through the social exploitation of the working class, the imposition of totalitarian controls upon the entire country, and the destruction of political life and consciousness. It brought with it grave economic imbalances, profound social disruption, and extreme political barbarism, the effects of which will be felt for decades to come. No, this was not the "thunder" that Trotsky or any other Bolshevik leader of the twenties had proposed

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or even imagined. An observation by one of Trotsky's former collaborators, Max Shachtman, is worth quoting here:

> The workers' power in Russia, even in the already attenuated form of a dictatorship of the Bolshevik party, stood as an obstacle in the path of [capital] accumulation precisely because, on the one hand, genuine socialist accumulation was impossible under conditions of an isolated and backward country and, on the other hand, workers' power was incompatible with any other kind of accumulation. This power, then, had to be shattered.

It had, that is, to be shattered by Stalin's totalitarian dictatorship, which did indeed manage to impose a layer of industrialization on Russia's backward economy but in doing so created a socio-political structure profoundly in conflict with socialist values.

A more cogent criticism of Trotsky's course in the twenties concerns his failure to speak out in behalf of a multi-party democracy within the limits of "Soviet legality." In 1917, a few weeks before the October revolution, when Trotsky was elected President of the Petrograd Soviet, he had promised: "We shall conduct the work of the Petrograd Soviet in a spirit of lawfulness and of full freedom for all parties." Toward the end of his life Trotsky would write that "Only when the civil war began, when the most decisive elements of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries took part in the civil war on the other side of the barricades, we prohibited them. It was a military measure, not a permanent step." All recent political experience inclines us to suspect such arguments from necessity, so badly abused have they been; and even if one grants some force to Trotsky's claim one must also heed the careful documentation in Leonard Schapiro's *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy,* an account of the repeated violations of democratic procedures by the Bolshevik regime in the years between 1917 and 1922, a good many of which could not be attributed to the pressures of the civil war. In any case, Trotsky's decision to limit himself during the factional struggles of the twenties to a demand for democracy within the Bolshevik party placed him in a severe contradiction. Democracy within a ruling party, especially if it dominates a society in which property has become the possession of the state, is finally impossible unless it is extended beyond the limits of that party. Trotsky was

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demanding both a monopoly of power and a monopoly of freedom for the Bolsheviks: something just barely possible for a brief interval but surely not for longer. There is no reason to suppose that if he had raised the demand for multi-party democracy it would have strengthened his cause or re-established his popularity. Such a demand would probably have isolated him still further within the Bolshevik hierarchy and very likely not have sparked any great enthusiasm among the weary and impoverished masses. But what it would have done was to make his political and moral position more secure in the eyes of that historical posterity upon whose verdict he seemed so heavily to bank.

By 1928 Stalin had consolidated his power. The Left Opposition of Trotsky was crushed and the Right Opposition of Bukharin rendered powerless; the members of both groups were driven into exile, silenced in prison, or broken to recant. Trotsky himself was sent to a distant region of Asian Russia and early in 1929 deported from the country. A pall of obedience fell over Russia, and then: terror.

It was now, in his years as a powerless and harassed exile, that Trotsky achieved his greatest moral stature. No longer were there masses of cheering listeners to inflame with his eloquence; no longer armies to spur into heroism; no longer parties to guide to power. The most brilliant figure of the revolution was cast by the usurping dictatorship as a heretic, then a traitor, and finally, in the macabre frame-ups of the Moscow Trials, an agent of fascism.

Driven from country to country, partly because of the pressures brought to bear by the Stalin regime and partly because the presence of the famous revolutionist, helpless and isolated though he might be, made governments feel uncomfortable, Trotsky found his final exile in Mexico. He lived always in danger of assassination, and at least one effort involving the Mexican Communist painter David Siqueiros was made upon his life before the actual murder. A number of Trotsky's political associates were killed by agents of the Russian secret police, and his children, including a son who had never shown any interest in politics, were systematically hounded in Russia.

But Trotsky continued to cry out his defiance, unbent and

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unyielding, caustic and proud, a solitary promethean figure; he continued to write his trenchant analyses of the totalitarian regime in Russia, its terrorism directed against defenseless millions, its byzantine deification of the dictator, its blundering ventures into European politics. One need not accept in whole or part the ideas of Trotsky in order to recognize that during his last decade he rose to an intellectual eminence and personal strength surpassing anything he had shown during his years of power. His productivity as a writer was amazing. Unburdened by office, he was once again the independent political analyst, historian and literary man; it was the role in life, as he had once said, that he most enjoyed; and he wrote now with an authority of statement, an incisiveness of structure, a cutting sharpness of phrase, a brilliant freedom of metaphor which require that he be placed among the great writers of our time.

Trotsky's writings on Germany in the immediate pre-Hitler years are a model of Marxist polemic and analysis, but also of polemic and analysis that can be valuable to the non-Marxist as well. With blazing sarcasm and urgency—he was never patient toward fools—he attacked the insane policy of the German Communists, which declared the Social Democrats to be "social fascists" representing a greater danger than the Nazis, and thereby prevented the formation of that united front of the left which he kept insisting was the one way to stop Hitler. Had his advice been followed (the Stalinists attacked him for "capitulating" to Social Democracy!), the world might have been spared some of the horrors of our century; at the very least, the German working class would have gone down in battle rather than allowing the Nazi thugs to take power without resistance. Only a little less important are Trotsky's writings on Spain during the thirties, writings in which he analyzed the difficulties of modernizing a stagnant country, the way the Spanish bourgeoisie, out of social greed and cowardice, would block measures toward reform or even a dynamic economy, thereby opening the way to fascism—in short, that complex of problems which in a few years would lead to the Spanish Civil War. Equally incisive, though, as it now seems, marred by dogmatic rigidity, are the writings Trotsky devoted to the social crisis of France during the late thirties, in which he analyzed the Popular Front as an unstable, inherently pusillanimous amalgam of bourgeois, socialist, and Stalinist parties lacking co-

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herent purpose or will. With an excess of revolutionary hopefulness, he saw the French working class as an historical agent striving toward revolutionary action but restrained by its corrupted leaders.

Trotsky's most important political commentary of the thirties—a commentary which has influenced and been used by even those writers who sharply disagree with him—was devoted to the problem of Stalinism. Step by step he followed the transformation of the Stalin dictatorship into a full-scale totalitarian state, denouncing the economic policies by which the regime aggravated the exploitation of the masses in behalf of its mania for super-industrialization, enriching (though sometimes also confusing) his description of Stalinism with historical analogies drawn from the decline of the French Revolution, and riddling the claims of those Western liberals who had begun to praise the Soviet Union only after it had sunk into totalitarianism. Again and again Trotsky was accused of exaggeration and spite in his attacks on the Stalin regime; the American liberal weeklies printed recondite discussions of the "psychological causes" behind his attacks, but almost everything he wrote would later be confirmed by the revelations that started coming out of the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. In the mid-thirties Trotsky was also forced to devote his time to refuting the lies of the Moscow Trials; he did not live long enough to hear Khrushchev admit they had been frame-ups contrived by the state, though he did live long enough to hear some American liberals accept them as truth and praise them as therapy.

All the while Trotsky kept working to create a new movement of the revolutionary left, the Fourth International, which would be loyal to the original principles of Marxism-Leninism. This effort failed. The masses of radical workers in Europe remained attached, however passively, to the traditional parties of the left and showed no interest in the tiny Trotskyist groups, while those intellectuals who broke away from Stalinism often found themselves reconsidering and then abandoning the whole Leninist outlook. As a political leader in those years Trotsky tended to be fractious and inflexible, perhaps because his imagination was still caught up with the myth of the Russian Revolution and could not easily adapt itself to the reduced scale of political action within which he was now confined. Among

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the scattered groups of the non-Communist left he won more admiration than adherence.

The most enduring portion of Trotsky's writings during the years of exile was not, however, directly polemical or narrowly political. It was directed to the world at large, rather than the constricted circles of radicalism, and today it is surely the most immediately accessible to readers untrained in radical ideology. Trotsky's autobiography, his unfinished book on Lenin, his severely controlled study of Stalin, that masterful compression of his basic views on Stalinism called *The Revolution Betrayed,* but above all, *The History of the Russian Revolution*—these are among the major works of his eleven years of exile. The *History* is Trotsky's masterpiece. It is a work on the grand scale, epic in proportion, brilliant in color, vibrant with the passions of strongly-remembered events. Throughout the book there is a rising tension, so characteristic of modern writing, between the subjective perceptions of a highly self-conscious author and the unfolding of a sequence of history taken to be determined by objective law. The book unfolds into great complexity—the complexity of revolutionary craft and assurance—from a simple but commanding image: the meeting of Russian worker and Russian peasant, often in his guise as soldier or Cossack, their first hesitant gropings toward each other, the subsequent drama of retreat and reconciliation, and finally, a clasp of unity. Apart from its claim to being a faithful record and true interpretation, the *History* is a major work of twentieth-century literature, deserving to be placed beside the masterpieces of modern writing.

During the last years of his life Trotsky not merely wrote with great vigor in reply to the calumnies of the Moscow trials, not merely composed a number of major works, not merely produced a steady barrage of topical pieces on political and literary themes; he also engaged in sharp debates with intellectual opponents ranging from independent Marxists who disagreed with him on the "class nature" of the Russian state to liberals and socialists who challenged his assumption that between Bolshevism and Stalinism there was a fundamental conflict rather than a deep continuity. To support this assumption he wrote an ambitious essay, "Their Morals and Ours," in which he argued for the historical relativity of moral standards, tried to show the social causes of the moral distance between Bolshevism

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and Stalinism, reiterated his defense of the methods employed by the early Bolshevik regime, and had little difficulty in demonstrating that his liberal critics were necessarily quite as committed to the belief that "the end justifies the means" as they charged he was. In the less polemical sections of this essay Trotsky struggled with the problems of the relation between historically-conditioned moral values, reflecting the interests of social classes and therefore in constant flux, and those moral "absolutes" he was inclined to depreciate as excessively abstract, but which he nevertheless found it impossible to avoid using himself.

In the last year or two of his life Trotsky plunged into a discussion concerning the political role and sociological nature of Stalinist Russia, which had been provoked by some of his American followers who found increasingly unsatisfactory his view that Russia merited "critical support" in the war because it remained a "degenerated workers' state." Trotsky clung hard to this position. When the Russian armies marched into Finland, he denounced the invasion as another instance of Stalinist reaction, yet because he saw the Russo-Finnish war as part of a larger conflict between the bourgeois West and the Soviet Union, he continued in his writings to give the latter "critical support."

This discussion might seem, at first glance, another of those exercises in ideological hair-splitting which occupy radical sects; but it had a genuine value, since the issues that were being discussed would have to be faced by anyone trying to provide a theoretical framework for the study of Stalinism. Trotsky held that Stalinist Russia should still be designated as a "degenerated workers' state" because it preserved the nationalized property forms that were a "conquest" of the Russian revolution; in his view it was a society without an independent historical perspective, one that would soon have to give way either to capitalist restoration or workers' democracy. His critics insisted that the loss of political power by the Russian working class meant that it no longer ruled in any social sense, for as a propertyless class it could rule only through political means and not in those indirect ways that the bourgeoisie had employed in its youthful phase. Stalinism, they continued, showed no signs of producing from within itself a bourgeois restoration; quite the contrary, for the bureaucracy had become a new ruling class,

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with interests of its own in opposition to both capitalism and socialism. Trotsky did not live long enough to follow this dispute into the post-war years.

The last years of his life were difficult. Neither poverty nor powerlessness seemed to trouble him as much as the constrictedness of his daily existence; he worked under the constant protection of the guard his friends provided him, and he chafed at being unable to move about freely. For many years he had been living with his second wife, Natalia Sedov, in a marriage that was a model of mutual considerateness and devotion; together they now suffered blow after blow, as the news came of the death or disappearance of sons and friends. In his public conduct Trotsky remained firm and vigorous; privately, he suffered from intervals of depression. Once he apparently contemplated suicide. The indignity of needing to defend himself against the slanders pouring out of Moscow, the frustrations he suffered trying to rebuild a political movement ("I give advice because I have no other way to act," he wrote to a friend in France), the annoyance of having to write certain articles and books for merely financial reasons, the pain he felt at seeing so many people close to him persecuted by the Russian regime, the anxiety that he might not live long enough to fulfill the tasks he had set himself—all these left their mark. Trotsky was a man of enormous self-discipline, with an unshakable conviction as to his place in history and his responsibility to the idea of socialism; but he was also a complex and sensitive human being, impatient with the turn of history which had left him helpless—but only for the moment, he believed—to influence events. In the mid-thirties he kept a diary which reveals sudden flashes of unhappiness and irritation, as if he were rebelling against the disproportion between his intellectual powers and his political opportunities. But the diary also reveals capacities for human warmth and intensity of feeling, above all toward his admirable wife. And there are sentences which open a more intimate view of him: "Old age," he wrote, "is the most unexpected thing that happens to a man."

Only sixty when he was murdered, Trotsky was still a vigorous man who might otherwise have lived on for a number of years and continued to write and work. It would have been profoundly interesting to see how he would have responded to the intellectual crises of

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the post-war years, when as it seemed to many observers, all political systems, including both Marxism and classical liberalism, proved insufficient. Trotsky's mind was a mixture of the rigid and the flexible: he held unquestioningly to the basic tenets of Marxism, but within those limits was capable of innovation and risk. The problems he was forced to grapple with were qualitatively different from those which the greatest minds in his tradition had had to confront; for Trotsky was living in the time of the debacle of socialism and the triumph of totalitarianism, events that none of his intellectual ancestors had foreseen.

In one of his last articles, "The USSR in War," he showed a readiness at least to consider the possibility that the proletariat might not fulfill the revolution that he and other Marxists had so long expected. He knew quite well that in such an event he would have to initiate a fundamental shift in political thought:

> If this war provokes, as we firmly believe, a proletarian revolution, it must inevitably lead to the overthrow of the bureaucracy in the USSR and regeneration of Soviet democracy on a far higher economic and cultural basis than in 1918. . . . If, however, it is conceded that the present war will provoke not revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative: the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime. The inability of the proletariat to take into its hands the leadership of society could actually lead under these conditions to the growth of a new exploiting class. . . .

There were other problems—already present during the last years of Trotsky's life but visible in their full significance only during the decades since his death—which call into question at least parts of his political outlook. Can, for instance, the modern phenomenon of totalitarianism, with its profound irrationality, its systematized terrorism, and its tendency to suppress traditional class dynamics, be understood adequately in terms of Trotsky's Marxism? Trotsky, it is true, had kept writing that in the absence of socialism, there would be a relapse into a kind of modern barbarism, and the Europe of the thirties and forties certainly sustained this prediction. But to predict a phenomenon is not necessarily to describe it fully or under-

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stand it adequately; and for those purposes his intellectual outlook did not, in the era of totalitarianism, suffice. Or again: can the murder of six million Jews in Europe be satisfactorily explained through his theory that Nazism represented the last brutal attempt by the German bourgeoisie to retain power? Similarly, with his treatment of the problem of democracy. He was extremely sensitive to the numerous signs of the decay of European democracy during the years between the two world wars, and his writings on Germany, France and Spain often brilliantly register the ways in which the crisis of capitalism endangered the survival of democracy. But the "class analysis" of democracy, to which Trotsky was committed, seems not at all sufficient for an era in which it has become so painfully clear that freedom and liberty—far from being mere guises of class domination—are the most precious values of human life and that without them little remains but servitude.

Staying within the limits of Trotsky's ideology, it would be difficult to account for the considerable stability and the marked rise in living standards that have characterized the life of Western capitalism and that now call into question the whole revolutionary perspective. This does not approximate what he called "the death agony of capitalism," though there does of course remain the possibility that the crises he predicted have merely been delayed. Nor have his prognoses concerning Russia been realized: the post-Stalin society ruled by Khrushchev has achieved a relative stability; it is neither threatened by bourgeois restoration nor within measurable distance of socialist democracy, but maintains itself as an authoritarian dictatorship, keeping terror in reserve but not employing it with the maniacal consistency of Stalin.

These apparent failures in historical prediction are not as disturbing as Trotsky's refusal or inability to reconsider some of his intellectual premises. In his last book, the biography of Stalin, there are perhaps one or two signs that he had begun to feel some uneasiness about the Bolshevik heritage, but for the most part he continued to defend it to the last. His powers of mind operated within the boundaries of a fixed political tradition, but not toward scrutinizing his own assumptions. One could hardly have expected him to repudiate his lifework, and much of the anti-Bolshevism directed against him in the late thirties must be acknowledged to have been

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crude in method and purpose. Yet for a Marxist theoretician who so fiercely and effectively criticized every move of the Stalinist regime and who so contemptuously swept aside all of its pretexts for the suppression of freedom, there should have been a stronger impetus to turn back to the early years of Bolshevism and submit them to the kind of objective critical study that historical distance alone makes possible.

It is very hard to imagine that Trotsky's influence in the future will be of the kind he anticipated: a renewal of orthodox Marxism in theory and proletarian revolution in practise, along the lines that have come to be known as "Trotskyism." We are living in times that disintegrate all fixed ideologies, and the idea of socialism, if it is to survive as more than an historical memory or a label incongruously attached to authoritarian states, will surely go through a good many transmutations and critical revisions in the coming years. But the writings of this extraordinary man are likely to survive, and the example of his energy and heroism likely to grip the imagination of generations to come. In the Eastern European countries heretics turn instinctively to his forbidden books. In the West political thinkers must confront his formidable presence, parrying his sharp polemics and learning from his significant mistakes. Trotsky embodied the modern historical crisis with an intensity of consciousness and a gift for dramatic response which few of his contemporaries could equal: he tried, on his own terms, to be equal to his time. In his power and his fall, Leon Trotsky is one of the titans of our century.

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POEMS

THREE BILLS

Once at the Plaza, looking out into the park
Past the Colombian ambassador, his wife,
And their two children—past a carriage-driver's
Rusty top hat and brown bearskin rug—
I heard three hundred-thousand-dollar bills
Talking at breakfast. One was male and two were female.
The gray female complained
Of the plantation lent her at St. Vincent
"There at the end of nowhere." The brown stocky male's
Chin beard wagged as he said: "I don't see,
Really, how you can say that of St. Vincent."
"But it is the end of nowhere!" *"St. Vincent?"*
"Yes, St. Vincent." "Don't you mean St. Martin?"
"Of *course,* St. Martin. That's what I meant to say, St. Martin!"
The blond female smiled with the remnants of a child's
Smile and said: "What a pity that it's not St. Kitts!"
The bearded male went for a moment to the lavatory
And his wife said in the same voice to her friend:
"We can't stay anywhere. We haven't stayed a month
In one place for the last three years.
He flirts with the yardboys and we have to leave."
Her friend showed that she was sorry; I was sorry
To see that the face of Woodrow Wilson on the blond
Bill—the suffused face about to cry
Or not to cry—was a face that under different
Circumstances would have been beautiful, a woman's.

Randall Jarrell

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SEEN THROUGH A WINDOW

A man and a woman are sitting at a table.
It is supper time. The air is green. The walls
Are white in the green air as rocks under water
Retain their own true color though washed in green.
I do not know either the man or the woman,
Nor do I know whatever they know of each other.
Though washed in my eye they keep their own true color.

The man is all his own hunched strength, the body's
Self and strength, that bears, like weariness,
Itself upon itself, as a stone's weight
Bears heavily on itself to be itself.
Heavy the strength that bears the body down.
And the way he feeds is like a dreamless sleep;
The dreaming of the stone is how he feeds.

The woman's arms are plump, mottled a little
The flesh, like standing milk, and on one arm
A blue bruise, got in some household labor or other,
Flowering in the white. Her staring eye,
Like some bird's cry called from some deepest wood,
Says nothing of what it is but what it is.
Such silence is the bird's cry of the stone.

SEVERAL VOICES

the tall man

Height scares me. I am always afraid of falling.
The snaky sea lies coiled about my feet.
When I fall down those snakes will raven me.

the fat woman

I billow on my bones. The axis of the world

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Bears seas about itself in its difficult turning.
Where is this heavy world lumbering to?

the pretty girl

The blossom on the stem, tossed in a sunny wind.
The hummingbird and bee come to me for favor.
Giving and taking, we're a whole act together.

the old sick man

What scares me is the bright touch of a sharp point
Of white light, piercing my dark.
I prayed I'd go to sleep in that pitch dark.

David Ferry

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Alberto Moravia

IMAGES OF AFRICA

Accra, March

From the terrace of my room, I have a panoramic view of Accra, capital of Ghana. Under a sky of veiled blue, full of mists and ragged yellow and gray clouds, the city resembles an enormous cabbage soup in which numerous bits of white pasta are boiling. The cabbages are the tropical trees with their thick, cascading foliage of dark green speckled with black shadows; the bits of pasta, the buildings of reinforced cement, brand new, which by now are rising up in large numbers throughout the city. One of these buildings is my hotel, which is located in the middle of a large park all aflame with red flowers. It is an enormous construction, very new, in that sparkling, colorful, decorative and ultra-modern style called neo-liberty. In this hotel, there are high arcades with groups of chairs and tables where you can sit and sip good iced drinks; there is a vast high-ceilinged dining room with large windows, everything harmonizing in periwinkle blue and creamy yellow, immaculately clean, every table sparkling with polished silver and gleaming crystal, with African waiters dressed as though for an eighteenth-century ballet; there is a large cocktail lounge with a bar that is high and massive like an altar; there is a spacious and comfortable lobby; there is an elevator made entirely of metal that brings you to the wide, ventilated, well-lit corridors of the upper floors; there are rooms all fitted out with great luxury, from the baths with highest quality porcelain to the plastic floors, to the curtains of a tropical fabric, and to the light modern furniture.

When was this hotel built? A short while ago, since Gunther, in his

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book on Africa, speaks of Accra in 1954 in these not very attractive terms: "It looks like a collection of tin hovels interspersed with dilapidated frame buildings and tawdry hole-in-the-wall shops under moldy arcades. The impression a visitor is apt to get is one of an almost desperate squalor. . . ." Two or three years ago, perhaps. Besides, we have already mentioned that this is not the only modern building in Accra. A brief visit to the modern part of the city reveals ministries in the most modern style built on pilework of reinforced cement, with long verandas of the colonial type; onto them open the doors of rooms in which, amid the Swedish style furniture, government officials in sleeveless shirts and white trousers examine papers, aided by secretaries who are invariably pretty and well-dressed; cottages buried in the dark, brooding, tropical vegetation; villas dotted with balconies.

The streets of this residential area in Accra wind through exuberant flowering gardens like paths in a huge park; in these streets, one sees few pedestrians and many automobiles of American and English make.

Naturally, the city of hovels that Gunther spoke about still exists now, alongside the modern and luxurious city. Ten minutes by car from my hotel, the asphalt of the roads becomes yellow earth, and the cement constructions lined up in orderly rows along the sidewalks are replaced by innumerable huts and "tukul" gathered like mushrooms at the edges of the steep excavations. And the center of Accra certainly isn't modern: a sprawling street that looks as if it had been yanked out of a small town in the Far West with two lines of uneven mismatched buildings, here a modern building all of glass, there a hut with a corrugated tin roof, further on a long low factory of two floors, even further on a shanty with a straw roof. And along the sidewalks, alternating with crowded parking lots, are the open markets with the merchandise laid out on the stones and the women vendors, all enormously corpulent, hidden under huge straw hats, their thighs overflowing the tiny stools on which they're seated.

Between these two cities, the one modern and luxurious, the other decaying and poverty-stricken, there is no intermediate zone whatsoever, no area of average middle-class houses; just as in Accra and in all of Africa there has been no phase of transition between the colonialism of yesterday and the neo-capitalism of today. It has gone from soldiers in cork helmets to bankers in printed vests; from the ancestral hut to the skyscraper, abruptly and without transition. The young government official who works in the most modern offices has a father who lives in a hut on the savanna and drives his flocks to pasture, holding a

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shepherd's crook in one hand, and a lance in the other to defend himself against leopards and lions.

What this demonstrates is that neo-capitalism is advancing in Africa with the speed, the impetus and the impetuousness of a fire attacking a very dry or oily substance. The hotel, in Accra, for example, is only one of many similar hotels that have appeared almost everywhere on the black continent, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. Next to the hotels, a quantity of buildings have sprung up in the modern sections of the African cities which testify to the interests of European and American capital in Africa: proud, gloomy and icy banking centers with those black polished marbles and granites of a thick gray texture that one sees in Zurich, London, New York, Frankfurt; small pocket skyscrapers of glass and metal with lines of brass name-plates on which one reads various writing ending with the magic initials: Ltd; great department stores with immense windows, escalators, and salesgirls dressed in uniform as they are in the ten-cent stores of New York.

We are by now a long way from the old colonialism with its decadent bungalows, its Victorian hotels, its slave-like bars, its dusty shops and, in short, all its picturesqueness in the Conrad style. Neo-capitalism, in no way intimidated by malaria, by the tze-tze fly, by the humid heat and the dry heat, by the mud of the rains and the dust at the height of summer, by the backwardness and primitiveness of the population, and the lack of streets and of cities, strengthened by its past victories in mechanical and pharmaceutical fields, today feels itself capable of absorbing Africa much more rapidly and effectively than it could over-populated Asia and lethargic South America. In addition, the interests of neo-capitalism in Africa are justified not only by the market in hand-made goods and by the presence of the most diverse mineral riches, but also by its rivalry with communism and by the need to establish itself quickly in order to frustrate, with an industrial revolution, every possibility of a political revolution.

But others, with all the statistics at their disposal, would know how to describe more precisely than I what the neo-capitalist invasion of Africa is today in facts and figures. What interests me are all those things which the economists can not ignore, or rather those aspects of the invasion which are more irrational but, by no means, less important. And in the meantime, there is no doubt that while the red star of communism shines over Asia, over Africa, at least for the present, the white star of neo-capitalism glitters. In other terms, there seem to be reasons of an historic, ethnic, psychological and aesthetic

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nature for which the African, facing problems of economic underdevelopment and social and cultural backwardness analagous to those of Asia, prefers instead the Western solutions. The "irrational" reasons for this preference can be reduced to three: the first is colonialism which, precisely because it is older, crueler and stronger here than anywhere else, has driven the Africans to adopt the culture of those very colonialists against whom they revolted: and this is due in part to the fact that in those cultures one finds the most effective antidote against the evils that they brought about, and in part to the relationship of attraction and repulsion that is always established between the executioner and the victim. The second reason is the individualistic nature of the African culture: Africa has never known the great centralizing and bureaucratic empires so diffuse in Asia; outside of the tribes, or of the family, the African was always as free as a bird in air or a fish in water. The third reason is the particular character of the magical and fetishistic religions of Africa which are not an obstacle, like Buddhism or Mohammedanism, to the understanding and acceptance of modern industrial civilization, but rather a stimulus to that understanding and acceptance exactly because of whatever there is of the magical and of the fetishistic in the machine. To these three reasons, one could add a fourth which has its origin in the infantile character of the African: neo-capitalism with its infinite mass-produced products of light industry, all well-made, ingenious and almost always superfluous, fascinates the Africans in the same way that the copper wires and glass beads of Venice fascinated them when the adventurers of one or two centuries ago offered them in exchange for gold, ivory and precious woods.

For the Africans, neo-capitalism is therefore everything that provides happiness in this life; in this sense, contrasted with the Asians who have accepted the severe Marxist humanism, the African is eudaemonistic.

These are my thoughts as I walk down the main street of Accra, through the most multicolored crowd I've ever seen in my life. What an incredible and cheerful sight: between the two lines of uneven mismatched buildings swarms a multitude dressed in fabrics of the most brilliant colors and the boldest designs imaginable. The men wrap these fabrics around their bodies in the style of Roman togas, from the head to the feet, leaving the neck, one shoulder and arm bare; the women wear them tight at the hips and the bosom like evening dresses for La Scala or the Metropolitan; kerchiefs of the same material wound around their heads with and tied into enormous bows that give the im-

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pression that they're carrying vases of flowers on their heads. The fabrics, as I said before, are barbarically colored and patterned; but an expert eye can not help but notice that this barbarousness is a second hand product, that is, it is a barbarousness filtered through the pictorial experiences of the European *avant garde*. The open markets offer innumerable bolts of these fabrics piled up on the sidewalks; I stop and have some of them shown to me. They are of very crude cotton, the price is very low; yet to have brought about the mixture of such violent and new colors and such extravagant and seductive patterns, one feels that the primitivism of Gauguin, cubism and *l'art nègre* were needed. Made in Manchester or in Holland, these fabrics interpret and, at the same time, stimulate the Africans' passion for the violent colors that always produce such a beautiful effect with their black skin.

I stroll along admiring the sight of all those men and women strutting down the dusty street in the scorching sun with their togas and their evening dresses, in an atmosphere of perpetual proud holiday; and then suddenly I remember something: those printed cotton fabrics that were shown to me during my trip to Russia in the *combinat* of Tashkent in central Soviet Asia. Placed side by side with the English and Dutch fabrics which the Africans of Accra wear, there is no doubt that the Soviet fabrics, printed in colors and fabrics that are drab and old-fashioned, would make a very poor impression. So there is reason to believe that these fabrics and in general all the products of Western light industry have paved the way, in a cultural and psychological sense, for neo-capitalist influence in Africa, while the well-known lack of Soviet light industry has produced the opposite effect as far as the ideological and political expansion of Communism is concerned. Of course, man does not live by colored fabrics and other similar products alone, but neither does he live by bull-dozers and tractors, turbines and excavators. And judging by the joy and pleasure with which the inhabitants of Accra wrap the multi-colored fabrics around them, one would say that at least in this part of the world, light industry provides greater satisfaction for man than heavy industry.

Kano, April

The Negroes walk. I have traveled thousands of kilometers in black Africa and everywhere, in the uncultivated territories as well as in the cultivated areas, I have seen single individuals, or couples, a man and a woman, or small families, or even groups of ten, twenty people of both sexes and of every age walking in terrible solitude through bound-

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less heaths swarming with trees and bushes, along the paths which, like tunnels, pierce the compact arborescent mass of the rain forest.

Where are these migrant Negroes going? They never have the air of the vagabond, or of the beggar, whose destination is unknown even to himself, since wherever he goes he will not find things changed. But the Negroes seem to know very well where they're going; and, in fact, they do know. In short, wherever the Negro goes, he is usually motivated by a concern for business affairs; that is, he moves principally for economic, mercantile reasons of subsistence. For the most part, the Negroes go and come from the markets, and when they are not going to and returning from the markets, they are on their way to the pastures or the fields, or else they are coming back from them; they may also move for family or social or magical reasons, but behind these reasons there is always the economic factor. Because the Negroes, although in their way capricious, fanciful, irrational, are one of the most trade-oriented races in the world, even if their trades are often at the archaic level of an exchange in kind and of the sale and simple acquisition of a few products of family manufacture. However, poverty is not enough to explain the Negroes' frenzy for trading. In reality, the Negro lives in a primitive, and therefore functional, civilization in which the social life is fixed at the level of the instinct of conservation.

Seen in this light, black Africa appears to be not the motley group of states and smaller states copied from the West and more or less cut along the lines of the old French and English colonies that one sees on the map, but a single organism in which an integrating and balancing economic unity is set against the infinite tribal fragmentation. And this is an affirmation based not on conjectures and illusory observations, but on the fact that in black Africa the cities where markets are located are found at the center of territories that do not coincide with, and, in fact, extend beyond political boundaries. This, you will say, also occurs in Europe. It is true; but in Europe, linguistic, political, military, religious, and in short, historical realities have their own concreteness which confers, so to speak, a sacred character on these boundaries. In Africa, instead, this concreteness does not exist, it being a question, as we have pointed out, of nations formed on the pattern of the colonies which, in their time, had been designed by the absurd will of the European colonizers. And so the markets with the paths, roads, land and water routes which join them to the inhabited centers are still today the only garment that man has known how to throw over the savage and archaic nudity of black Africa.

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Markets of Africa, beautiful and strange, where one feels, in visiting them, that their true function goes beyond mere buying and selling and that without them human life in Africa would truly be extinguished and would return to the savage level: I visited several of these markets, and everywhere I always found the same feverish atmosphere, excited, festive, panicked, like fairs that are, at the same time, religious reunion, political assembly, magical encounter, cultural exchange, erotic outburst.

They are found, for the most part, at the center of the cities, in fact, they form the nucleus of propelling energy; and at first sight, with their huts and hovels lined up on two sides of very narrow lanes, with their promiscuous and bawling crowds, their stench and their filth, they form an almost unbearable contrast with the cities around them, often constructed in a European or even American style, with houses, large buildings and small skyscrapers. But after a brief reflection, one is convinced that the contrast is only apparent. The cities may be, in fact ought to be, constructed in the European style; this is as it should be since black Africa has decided to become modern. But its heart remains the old African heart, and this also is as it should be, since, while modernizing itself, Africa also wishes to remain faithful to itself. Now the heart of the African cities, whether at Lagos or Accra, Ibadon or Kano, is the market: and the market preserves, in spite of the buildings that surround it, the character that it had in the time in which instead of buildings there was only the forest and the savanna: the character of the only social center of a primitive and embryonic world perpetually menaced by a pitiless dark nature.

Sometimes the market is not found at the city's center but outside, far from the inhabited area, perhaps because the city could not contain within its walls the crowding stalls of the vendors and the torrential flood of buyers. I remember especially one of these peripheral markets in the outskirts of Kano, which is the principal city of northern Nigeria and one of the Negro cities that has its own beautiful style, a cross between the barbaric and the Arab: a great inhabited center that, seen from the tower of the minaret of the Mosque, seems round like a globe, or like a bowl, in the middle of an endless plain of pale, and almost blue, green. This globe, this bowl, is a dark brick red; just here and there, the uniformity of this somber tint is broken by the jade green of some garden or some basin of municipal water. The houses, all one-storied and all made with mud mixed with straw and dried in the sun and painted that color *"terra di Sienna,"* have smooth walls with an undulating surface as if they were petrified waves; when the mud

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was still soft, the builder, with a pointed tool or spatula, marked furrows which also give a wave-like impression. These wall-waves, devoid of any opening, hermetic, with that rare small door or window here and there, form narrow and deserted streets in which the life of the African city reveals all its terrible poverty: dust, an occasional naked child, a woman crouched on the steps of a doorway pounding something into a mortar, a man cowering in the sun and the flies. The silence is profound; the sun that glitters among the red battlements of the walls, in the immaculately blue sky, is a vertical, a hard and burning sun and explains the hermetic quality of the city, Arab in feeling, although the Arab cities are white and Kano, instead, is all red, of exactly the color that the earth in Africa often has.

But Kano is a market city, that is, a city to which, from the farthest corners of Africa, both east and west, people flock, those who want to buy and those who want to sell. At fifty kilometers from Kano we were informed that on precisely that day a market was being held. We went there. After an hour speeding along jerkily on a sandy track through the swarming of the bush and the acacia of the savanna, there were the first signs of the market: groups of Negroes dressed in wide fluttering gowns of white cotton walking with that gay capricious step of theirs across the heath, headed toward an unimaginable goal. At first, there were only a few individuals, then some families, finally small strolling crowds; they walked quickly, chattering, laughing, gesticulating, with that anticipated enthusiasm and that premeditated promiscuity that are peculiar to those who are on their way to a gathering place in which they know they will be swallowed up by an even vaster multitude. In short, all these Negroes who were running a few at a time toward the market seemed to have already a foretaste of the moment when they would plunge themselves into the crowd, and confused with so many others in the dust, sweat and noise, they would find a compensation for that weak, irritating, and superfluous individual separateness.

But there is the market: an immense plain scattered with large trees of loose spreading foliage, and under the trees, a multitude all dressed in white like the crowds of an ancient Roman and Greek city. The plain was so flat that the crowd with its white gestures and movements stood out against the blue sky as if they were not standing on a plain but on a mountain top; this crowd, even from a distance one could see, was shaken by a violent confusion like that of different currents crossing in the sea during a storm. It swayed, it opened, closed again,

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came and went, turned, moved away and then near. These were the movements of the traders, and in fact, every once in a while, through an opening in the crowd, one caught a glimpse of a herd of oxen pushed one against the other, with myriads of black-nosed muzzles, myriads of immense crescent horns. Then the crowd closed again and above them, I could see great black vultures wheeling slowly, as if looking for some prey, and then they turned and crouched in the branches of the trees. A dust rose from the crowd that dimmed the air; a festive, gay, exuberant, contagious dust.

Then we approached and entered the crowd and wandered about for two or three hours in the inexhaustible human sea that divided for us in a strange automatic way, forming for us a narrow pathway among the bodies; the Negroes, however, hadn't seen us, so immersed were they in their festive hypnosis. It is useless to describe the merchandise that was laid out there on the ground between the feet of the squatting buyers. They were the usual products of African gardens, the few objects of their handicraft, or they were, instead, merchandise mass-produced in America and in Europe; always what impressed one the most was not the merchandise so much as the men, the buyers and sellers. The merchandise was lacking in interest; but what the men succeeded in doing with this miserable merchandise, what they derived from it other than money was inexhaustible and always new.

All of Africa, as I have said, is dotted with these markets. The Negroes leave, let us imagine, from Senegal and then, by land or by water, reach Onitsha on the Niger, not far from the river mouth. Look at the map, you will see that it is a question of thousands of kilometers. These enormous distances overcome in order to sell or to buy a sack of seeds or ten meters of cotton give a good idea of what the true Africa is in contrast to the Africa on the maps. One thinks, rather than of a continent divided into nations like Europe, of a great apolitical space, thick with tribes but lacking in nationality, a little like what the oriental territories between Poland and China must have been during the Middle Ages, with their great fairs and markets and their migrations from one fair to another. This character of black Africa, along with others that it is not convenient to describe here, leads us to predict, not a multitude of large and small nations in the European style, but a single organism united somewhat in the way large continental countries are, such as India or China or the United States or the Soviet Union. The Africans walk; their long tireless legs require space.

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Lagos, April

The Negroes dance. Somebody here at Lagos told me that sometimes, at the dockyards, the black workers improvise a dance to the rhythm of the motor of an excavator or a drill. To those who are familiar with the simplicity of the music with which the Africans often accompany their dances, drums played by hand, or clapping of the hands and snapping of the fingers, this transformation of the bulldozer into a musical instrument will not seem so unusual. But still the news has its significance. First of all, it indicates an irresistible inclination to express in dance not this or that particular moment of life, such as, for example, agricultural work or sexual initiation, but all of life; and secondly, the fact that the Negro is the only one among the so-called primitives who is capable, through the dance itself, of happily becoming part of modern industrial civilization.

On the second point, just a few words will suffice. There are primitive peoples in all five continents who translate into dance the religious and social manifestations of their existence; but only the Negro has succeeded in becoming a modern man while conserving intact his traditional dancing ability. The frequent phenomenon of modern dances invented by the Negroes in America is so well known that it isn't necessary to demonstrate it in detail. If anything, one could say that the dance is the most striking aspect of the contagious primitive rhythm that the Negro has introduced into Western civilization. This rhythm which, by now, seems to us to be indivisible from and deeply rooted in the civilization of machines, comes, instead, directly from an archaic pre-historic world—that of the savanna and the forests of black Africa. That is the most precious gift that Africa has given to the world; on the other hand, the descendants of the slaves sold on the markets of Bahia or New Orleans have shown themselves more capable of assimilating Western civilization than any other primitive, or at any rate, non-European people.

As for the first point, i.e., translating all of life into dance, one could say that this is one of those obvious things which for that very reason escapes attention. And yet the phenomenon is not so simple. I remember, for example, a day when I was driving along the still unfinished road that goes from Lagos to Benin: a strip of earth red as blood between two vertical walls of nearly black foliage. Suddenly in the distance, we saw a group of Negroes who were walking in the middle of the road, dressed in the usual fluttering multi-colored gowns. They were walking calmly, with that tireless, brisk and carefree walk that the Negroes have when, without apparent goal, they stroll through

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the boundless spaces of their continent. However, when we were a short distance from the group, a tall slender young man began to improvise a dance step, moving away somewhat from the others. His companions didn't look at him, they continued to walk on chattering and laughing. But suddenly a woman began to dance too, still walking at the same time: then another boy, then another woman, finally the whole group, as if taken with a kind of infection or automatic imitation; they proceeded down the road, in that majestic and funereal solitude of the forest, jumping, shaking their arms and swaying their hips, with a frenzy and a violence that the calm bearing of a few moments before had not, in any way, foretold.

We passed next to them. There was an old man who carried strung across his back a small wooden drum which he beat at the edges with his palms; there were some young men with fluttering streamers of colored cloth thrown over their shoulders; there were boys and some almost naked children. All were dancing while they walked, their excitement in strange contrast with the absolute immobility of the forest; and all had, in their white eyes, a fixed and abstract look that made one think of an easy ecstasy, in a manner of speaking, always within reach, always ready to make the fine screen of individuality fall away and let man communicate with the mystery. In this case, the mystery was there, two steps away, visible and obsessive: the forest grandiose and hostile, beneath which they wandered like the faithful beneath the nave of a cathedral. The group continued to dance while we passed by. The road was straight, after about half a kilometer, I turned and looked back: the group was no longer dancing; now they had gone back to walking with a normal step.

What do I wish to express with this example? I wish to express what I have already said before: that the Negro dances his life; and that for this reason there is always in his dance something surprising, something that springs up unexpectedly. In reality, the Negro doesn't know what is waiting for him in the dance; in the same way, we usually do not know what is waiting for us in life. He tries to move his body in a certain direction, according to a certain rhythm. Sometimes, moving in this way, he succeeds in entering into a more general, a vaster rhythm which flows around him like a sea current that flows around the body of a swimmer; and then he begins to dance. But sometimes the personal rhythm doesn't succeed in becoming a part of the universal rhythm, and then the Negro immediately stops dancing and goes back to his normal step. But still, he tries, he tries continuously, and with the obstinacy and the patience of a water-diviner or a gold prospector.

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The dance, for the Negro, is also a means of joining with, or better, of freeing himself from his superficial individual form and blending with the others in the same way that different pieces of various metals are blended in a single crucible. I still remember, in this connection, a day when, returning from a trip to Ibadon, we passed through the periphery of Lagos. The road ran along an uninterrupted line of hovels fantastically blackened and warped by the humidity, huts patched with bottoms of tin cans and parts of boxes, low constructions painted red and covered with roofs of sheet iron. Now and then, between one hovel and another, a field opened out, land that could be used for building although it had not yet been, in which some mangy grass grew, grass that was shaggy and wild, very different from the more polite species found in the European suburbs. We were attracted by a throng that had gathered in one of these fields; we stopped the car and got out. It was a crowd all in blue, which is the color of the Yoruba tribe, one of the four great tribes into which Nigeria is divided. All those blue gowns, togas, trousers, shirts, tunics, head scarves, formed a great spot of deep blue, perverse, harsh, and chemical under the low overcast sky, framed by the red huts and large diffuse trees swarming in a green that was almost black. Within the blue, like a troubled sea, black faces, arms, shoulders were discernible here and there; or rather than black, they were the color of a darkly toasted coffee. We scarcely had time to get out of the car before the crowd rushed toward us, surrounded us, engulfed us. A moment earlier, we had been in an almost free space; a moment later, we were among the bodies of a hundred people, our nostrils perceived their odor, our skin their sweat, against our legs were their legs, against our chests theirs pressed; and hundreds of eyes stared at us avidly.

An old man, with a small skull cap on his head, explained to us that there was a dancing contest and if we wanted to attend we were most welcome. After hearing this explanation, I suddenly understood the gaze of all those eyes with the form and density of boiled eggs whose white has been disclosed through a hole, the yolk black; a gaze that was ecstatic and, in an inoffensive way, cannibalistic. And I also understood the sensation, of which I was unable to rid myself, of having been surrounded and swallowed up not by a multitude, but by a single palpitating warm body, with innumerable members, infinite huge eyes, and yet at the same time, only one body. This body, or more precisely, this momentary fusion of many bodies into one was an effect of the dance. When we declined the invitation, the crowd, after having pressed and squeezed up against us, imbuing us with their odor and their

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perspiration, with a vast flowing motion returned to the open space and there spontaneously re-formed the circle around the dancers. While we were getting back into the car, we could see at a distance some diabolic masks hopping and shaking and all around, a stormy sea of black woolly heads that swayed rhythmically.

For the Negroes, the dance still has the value of a purely individual display; and anyone can verify this fact by entering one of the many nightclubs that explode with their violent neon lights in the sweltering murky night on the Gulf of Guinea, deep in the lower-class sections of Lagos. They are for the most part located outdoors; their cement platforms open into the midst of a multitude of rickety peeling tables and tubular chairs; their orchestras are on a raised platform close to a confused, ragged background of slums and hovels. And yet when the music passionately and authoritatively attacks a twist or a high-life, the spectator immediately forgets the poverty of the setting and cannot help but be fascinated by the grace, the elegance, the unself-consciousness, the rhythm, the intense expressiveness of the dancers. When these tall lean Negroes, smothered in jackets and immense trousers, have caught hold of the streamer of the dance, they do not let go; and they move around the platform with the careless lightness of a leopard that tracks its prey among the grasses of the bush. Their partners, incredibly slender, fluid, and long-limbed, with ankles and wrists of a marvelous elegance, and heads impressively elongated, lengthened even more by solid cone-shaped hair styles, writhe before them in a manner that succeeds in being both completely chaste and utterly sensual.

Where have I seen them before, those slender figures, black and elegant, those heads all eyes and mouth, that skin with the oiliness, the roughness, the sheen and the dark color of bronze? But, of course, at the museum in whose glass cases the mysterious sculpture of the artists of Benin is displayed. In Europe that sculpture sometimes gives the impression of being almost a caricature. But here in the night clubs of Lagos, one realizes that they are realistic, in fact, almost photographic. It is nature that, in the gulf of Guinea, is expressionistic, subjective, delirious, unrestrained, caricature-like; not men. The men dance, and through the dance, express the madness of nature.

Lagos, March

Sometimes, I've asked myself the question: is black Africa older or younger, historically, than Europe? Considering it carefully, compared with Africa, which is primitive in the sense of being still wrapped in the cocoon of Nature, Europe, which shed that cocoon a long time

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ago, should be older. On the other hand, it is clear that black Africa is at a cultural stage that Europe had reached some thousands of years ago; therefore, in this case, Africa would be the older. But Africa is now entering, for the first time, the industrial civilization that has been established in Europe for two centuries, and thus Africa is younger. Still, one can not deny the fact that the African fails to comprehend the deeper meaning of this industrial civilization; he accepts it without understanding it and he doesn't understand it because his religious concepts precede not only Calvinism, which lies at the origin of that civilization, but Christianity itself; therefore Africa is older. But isn't the African perhaps younger than the European in that he is more irrational, more carefree, more infantile, more inclined toward dancing, singing, pantomime—that is art forms which don't demand intellectual maturity, and so on? But this is a trick of words. In reality, all things considered, the culture of Africa is archaic, decrepit, prehistoric.

Today, the Africans, after having remained fixed at this culture for millenia, are passing with a dizzying jump, because of a caprice not unusual in history, to the neo-capitalist, industrial culture. Thus, a trip to Africa, when it is not limited to a monotonous jaunt through the large hotels that Westerners have scattered over the black continent, is a plunge into prehistory.

But what is this prehistory that fascinates Europeans so much? First of all, let us say, it is the structure of the African landscape itself. The principal trait of this landscape is not its diversity, as in Europe, but rather its terrifying monotony. The face of Africa is therefore more similar to that of an infant with few of its features yet defined than to that of a man on which life has marked innumerable significant lines; or rather it is more similar to the face of the earth in prehistory when there were no seasons and man hadn't yet appeared than to the face of the earth today with its innumerable modifications wrought both by the seasons and by man himself. This monotony, on the other hand, presents two aspects that are truly prehistoric: repetition, that is the repeating of a single theme or motif to the point of obsession and terror; and formlessness, that is the inability to assume any limit, finiteness, or shape.

Prehistory, for example, is the savanna that covers Africa for thousands of kilometers from west to east, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. The savanna is a vast steppe, pale green in color, scattered as far as the eye can see with one type of tree, the small African acacia bristling with thorns, its branches opening out like an umbrella, and one type of circular bush of a dark green. You can

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drive for hundreds of kilometers on roads or dirt tracks and the steppe never ends; it does nothing but repeat itself, or rather repeat the two motifs that are uniquely its own, the acacia and the bush. The savanna is the home of the great feline animals, the lion and the leopard, as well as the herbivorous animals which serve as their food: zebras, gazelles, buffalo, antelope; but these animals are seen rarely.

Sometimes, very far away, in those remote deserted areas, you can discern myriads of black points moving rapidly through the swarming of the acacia and the bush: they are herds of zebras or gazelles fleeing who knows where, frightened by who knows what. If you stop in the middle of the savanna, the roar of the automobile is suddenly replaced by a virgin silence, suspended, truly prehistoric in its profundity and its transparency. You hear the wind blowing mutely; the sun floods the immense steppe with an implacable light; suddenly you feel yourself observed and you discover above the umbrellas of the acacia, rising up on enormous necks, the small large-eyed heads of some giraffes. These shy curious animals stand here and there among the trees like small graceful dinosaurs grazing in a land of the Mesozoic era; then startled by a gesture or a voice, they run away, one after the other, crossing the road with slow awkward heavy leaps, the legs high and the bodies massive. You go on your way again and the savanna begins to repeat once more the motif of the acacia and the bush millions and millions of times, for hundreds, for thousands of kilometers. Every once in a while, the savanna appears to rise a little toward the sky and to assume the shape of long soft hills that seem to enclose it and give it the form of a valley; but it is a futile attempt that invariably vanishes and dissolves into the usual formlessness.

Prehistory is also the rain forest that stretches below the savanna; it, too, extends for thousands of kilometers, uninterrupted from west to east, from the Atlantic to the Indian Oceans. The color of the savanna is pale green, a hint of yellow and of blue; the color of the forest is black. I drove through the forest, for example, on the road that goes from Lagos to the legendary Benin, once a center for marvelous sculptors and smiths. The road is narrow, straight, of earth red as blood; one might say that the forest was black flesh on which a long wound still open and living had been traced. Also here, you drive for hundreds and hundreds of kilometers without any change in the landscape: the forest, like the savanna, does nothing but repeat itself, to a point of obsession. The dominant motif is the tangled black of the trees, of the shrubs, of the lianas, and the creepers that rise up on both sides of

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the road and almost block the view of the sky, which is reduced to a blue stripe parallel to the red stripe of the road.

At first, this tangled forest seems quite varied in its foliage, its trunks, its hanging branches, but this variety also repeats itself until finally the eye tires and ceases to seek it and appreciate it. If you stop suddenly in the forest, here too you will be struck by the purity and transparency of the silence. The forest rises straight up on both sides of the road; a small stream winds through it, black, stagnant, unmoving among the trees; here and there along the shores of that low slimy water you can see enormous tree-trunks that fell from age and are decaying there in peace, the eternal death-like peace of prehistory. The forest is funereal, gloomy, mute and empty; and it seems that there is nothing in the forest but serpents and insects. The forest, also, like the savanna, seems to wish, every now and then, to escape from its formlessness and to simulate something finite, recognizable, formed, such as a clearing, a pathway, an isolated tree, a group of trees; but almost immediately this sign crumbles and vanishes into the formless green and dusk of the equatorial vegetation.

Prehistory in Africa exists not only in the structure of the landscape but also in the universal presence of the only religious belief that is truly aboriginal—magic. In Europe, the world of magic survives with modest, indecipherable relics, like the wreckage in the sea after a shipwreck; but in Africa you are always aware that the world of magic is still complete, intact and active as a concept of life. Now the world of magic is exactly that which is considered the evil of Africa, no longer by the Europeans, but by the Africans. This evil has its roots in fear, a fear of prehistory, of all the irrational forces which man, over many thousands of years, has succeeded in driving back and dominating in Europe, and which here in Africa are still intrusive and unchecked. It is a fear to which the European eventually becomes accustomed, since he has his roots elsewhere and his personality is more solid and less ephemeral than the African's; on the whole, it is a fear that is painfully pleasant. But the fear of the African, deprived as he is of a history, with a personality that flickers like a candle flame, is a beautiful, a good fear, a nameless fright, a perpetual, obscure terror. Magic is the expression of this fear of prehistory; it is as ugly, gloomy and demented as the evil of Africa is aphrodisiacal and pleasing, even if it is disintegrating and destructive. In reality, magic is the other face of Africa's evil.

At the market of Lagos, after having wandered around in the impure sultry air through various aisles of booths and stalls overflowing

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with merchandise and foodstuffs, all equally softened and inclined toward putrefaction by the tropical heat, I suddenly found myself in a clearing surrounded by huts. The clearing, as usual, was strewn with refuse of every kind, gutters of urine, fruit peelings, rotting food, small Negro babies completely naked and not yet able to walk; but on the ground in front of the huts some objects were displayed which attracted my attention. They were the so-called "ju-ju," those objects which the Africans use for their innumerable rituals of magic; objects that one can buy at the market and that must be much in demand, because in that clearing there were at least twenty huts, all of which offered the same hellish merchandise. And what were these "ju-ju"? First of all, arranged in two rows, several large smoked rats strung on sticks like figs from Calabria; then in a large basket, dried chameleons; finally, on a bench, plates and small baskets brimful of a repulsive mixture which my eyes found it hard to look at for long: small skulls of monkeys or dogs or rodents, hooves of gazelles or antelope, eyes and fingernails, hair and bristles, clay disks, excrement and unrecognizable putrefied fragments. All this rubbish had its own meaning, its destination, its price, its usefulness. The African goes to the market, buys the rat or the skull or the chameleon and then takes it home and uses it. In what way? The answer is of no importance. It is enough to say that he uses it and that he believes in it.

In the "ju-ju" one can discern the quality of a particular ugliness, both extravagant and repugnant, that is a product of fear. A murky and disgusting substitute for science, the "ju-ju" deceives itself with the belief that it is controlling prehistory while, in reality, it is the direct expression of prehistory. The same could be said about the masks which, still today in certain parts of black Africa, give a tone of perpetual and sinister carnival to the life of the Africans. These masks are well-known; by now, there's hardly a living room in Paris or London that doesn't have an African mask hanging on the wall. I will limit myself to recalling one among the many which I saw. In a large scraggly field on the outskirts of Lagos, we noticed a circle of men standing around idly. We approached and saw a masked man dancing, or rather, jumping from one foot to the other to the rhythm of a wooden drum which a decrepit and skeleton-like old man was beating with his palms. The body of the masked man was clothed in straw tied at the legs, the waist and the shoulders in such a way that you might have said a sheaf of straw was dancing; the face was covered with a black silk stocking on which several clusters of white shells had been sewn. With each jump, the straw moved and parted but

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did not reveal the body of the dancer who, as a result, seemed almost not to exist at all; and the clusters of shells rose, letting you glimpse the smooth black features of the face, with only the nose outlined under the silk of the stocking, like certain Negro statues which are otherwise stylized. Perhaps, at first glance, the masked dancer hadn't seemed terrifying; and yet after a while, he became almost unbearable to look at. Yet his intention was not to produce fear in the spectator—he "was" fear. The weakness of the terrified human being was expressed, by the Africans, through the body in the form of straw; the face, closed in the stocking and covered with shells like an underwater rock, alluded to man's incapacity to emerge with his face freed from a prolific and overwhelming prehistoric nature. Then, above the field, almost grazing the roofs of the huts that surrounded it, an enormous airplane flew over with a deafening roar. But the spectators didn't turn around, they didn't raise their eyes to the sky: all their attention was fixed on the masked dancer who personified fear.

San'a, February

The airplane descends, swaying over a wide pale green plain surrounded by steep brown mountains to the far horizons. It is the plateau glittering with sunlight on which, at two thousand meters, rises San'a, the capital of Yemen. Down there, very far away, crushed to the ground by the blue sky, you see the walls of the city, a rose-colored brown that suggests the color of turtle doves, with cylindrical towers set in rows at regular intervals. Between those walls and myself stretches a surface so flat that even the stones there project a shadow. The camels, tall and hunch-backed standing here and there on the plain, look like immobile chess pieces on a board.

Now the plane has come to a stop in front of a yellow cabin; under a shed in the sun, a crowd of bystanders watch two soldiers who, bending down, weigh the passengers' luggage on a dusty market scale. The brown hands with fine fingers make the weights run along the steel bar; a few kilos are added or subtracted; a scribe, squatting on the ground, rapidly covers a sheet of paper with fluttering signs. The two soldiers, having finished the weighing, get up and look at us. They are small and thin with narrow ankles and wrists, dark thin bearded faces. They both wear a black turban, a black jacket, a newly washed shirt, a white sash and a striped skirt tight at the hips and around the legs. Two polished metal cartridge belts cross over their chests: from the sash, at the height of the navel, projects the handle of a short scimitar; in its scabbard a smaller straight dagger is also

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fitted. On their feet, they wear the traditional Yemen sandal with the square sole; and over their shoulders, they carry an old rifle, a ninety-one model. Both have one smooth cheek and one swollen one as if suffering from a tumor. It is the gat, a small green plant whose leaves, when chewed for a long time, produce a euphoria not unlike, though less intense than, that caused by hashish. I indicate the swelling to the soldiers, and then, smiling, touch my cheek. Immediately, they both laugh; and then an expression of ingenuousness and gentleness appears on those fierce faces, correcting the first predatory impression.

Later, after leaving my suitcases at the rest-house, I go out for my first visit to San'a. The rest-house is at the end of one of those immense irregular dusty spaces which are the plazas of Arab cities; spaces imitated by the desert that surrounds the city and made purposely for the slow erratic advance of the camels, for the uneven trot of the donkeys and for the tumultuous migrations of the sheep. At the end of the plaza, like an ancient altar-piece representing Jerusalem or Byzantium, rise the walls of San'a with the round towers and the gateway and beyond the walls, the famous palaces. I say "famous" because San'a, until yesterday forbidden to foreigners, is one of the architectural myths of the Orient; as far as I know, it is impossible to see buildings such as these in any other country of Arabia.

Well, there they are: the famous legendary palaces. They are very tall, five or six floors, square, massive, thick, almost towers or fortresses; constructed of bricks of dry mud, they have a uniformly brown color against which white decorations made with lime and stucco stand out. In these cornices that look like spun sugar, in these rosettes laid out like certain Italian playing cards above prison-like windows, in these arabesques like hand-made lace, there is nothing of the geometrical rigor of great Arab architecture, but only a witty and crude Bedouin parody.

They are really hand-made palaces, simple, mixed from mud and straw, constructed without a plumbline, with walls sometimes oblique or bulging, decorated with an artisan improvisation, according to a crude and rustic tradition. And now I recall those houses and palaces, also old and crooked and decorated with openwork designs, that are lined up along the canals of Venice. Yes, San'a is a small Bedouin Venice built in the middle of the steppe on the Yemen plateau, like Venice in the middle of the waters of the lagoon. The same oriental imagination concerned with decorative and fairy-tale effects seems to have conceived both these cities.

I enter the city through the gate called Bab-al-Yemen, between two

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towers around which, with the usual ability of oriental crowds to form a picture or even an oleograph, swarm street-peddlers, passers-by, soldiers, idlers, women and boys, and wandering about apparently free and without masters are dogs, sheep, goats, donkeys and even camels. The double-door of the gateway which, until two or three months ago, was kept closed and bolted from sunset to dawn, is wide open; it looks ancient, its warped and worm-eaten planks studded with old iron knobs. Once in the city, the similarity to Venice is confirmed. These little streets that wind in shadow between high, hanging façades recall, in fact, the narrower and more secret canals of Venice. Only that at San'a, the canals are filled, not with water, but with a soft yellow dust in which you sink up to the ankle, with every step raising stinging clouds that catch at the throat and make the nostrils ache.

Venice of dust, San'a, equal to the Venice of the lagoon, also has its plazas and small squares, or more precisely, irregular spaces at times vast and spread out, at others, narrow and intimate, around which the palaces are arranged with casual, yet always supremely picturesque, views. And finally, as in Venice, between one palace and another, sprout the green tufts of trees from the thick gardens closed between the walls. San'a, evidently, is famous for these gardens which the Yemenites speak of as if they were the most delicious and perfect places. However, it is true that in such praise imagination also plays a part; the imagination of a people like the Arabs to whom, with their vast collection of deserts, even a scrubby, dusty oasis seems a voluptuous paradise.

You wander endlessly through the obsessive labyrinth of these serpentine streets; looking up at the tall façades, on every floor you can see swaying flowers arranged on a vertical groove that goes from the roof to the sidewalk. Through these grooves the dirty water from the houses runs down; and, in fact, there is a stench in the streets and here and there the dust becomes an impure slime. But the doors of carved wood with their padlocks and bolts; the multi-colored glass, blue, red, yellow, green, of the windows; the flight through these streets of girls wrapped in black veils; the scene in the plazas of groups of camels kneeling in the dust; the gardens and courtyards that are glimpsed beyond the doors console you for these medieval inconveniences. Finally, after much wandering, one of the streets flows into the *canal grande* of San'a: a wide, deep, waterless bed brimming with dust and rocks, its steep earthy banks guarded by two rows of towering and illustrated palaces. The *canal grande* of San'a, after having divided

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the city in two, comes to an abrupt end when it reaches some walls of dried mud which, at that point, have no opening.

San'a, like all cities in the Orient, is divided into two areas: the area in which the people live, mysterious and deserted, whose hermetic atmosphere expresses the well-known cryptomania of the Moslems with their medieval concept of family life; and the area in which they do business, a tumultuous crowded place that is almost too insolent and aggressive in its bustle and trade. Here in the streets swarming with passers-by whose activities and destinations are difficult to determine, the shops are the size of closets; inside these square low-ceilinged rooms, the shopkeepers sit on crossed legs in front of a pile of seeds or a bowl full of farina: it is difficult to imagine a poorer and more symbolic type of commerce. And in these streets where everybody looks at things but few buy anything, perhaps less money circulates than in one large Western department store or supermarket. Even the vivacity of the crowd has nothing modern about it. It is the vivacity of the Middle Ages, composed of rags and of colors, of mean dealing and subtle trickery, of shouting and gesticulation, of ingenuousness and cunning; that vivacity that sparkles in the pages of Boccaccio's minor works and in those of the more realistic stories in *A Thousand And One Nights*. Everything that would be impossible in a modern city today here at San'a happens frequently: to be interrogated on the street by curious bystanders of every type; to be followed by a train of men armed to the teeth but intimidated by a camera; to see the crowd surround you, attentive, in suspense, as though expecting some miracle, or at least something extravagant, to happen. Yemen was opened to foreigners only three months or so ago, after the expulsion of the Imam, and so because of the obscurantism of a prince, conditions of isolation and segregation that were normal everywhere in the Middle Ages were created in this country. But there is no xenophobia in the crowd at San'a. If anything, there is that trusting and ingenuous familiarity with which, on certain deserted islands, the native birds approach the men.

At the end of my walk on what must be the main street of San'a, after having examined one by one the shops in which the artisans make things under the very eyes of the buyer, a sign printed in English and in Arabic indicating the Bank of the Yemen State reminds me that I must change some money. I enter a small courtyard, between white walls without windows; squatting on the ground near a pool of clear water, two men in black turbans and green robes are counting a great

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deal of silver money and arranging it in piles. I go into a small room on the first floor and show a check to another similarly dressed individual who is stretched out on a sofa on three or four pillows. Immediately, I'm told to make myself at home; a servant brings me a Turkish coffee; I am questioned regarding my travel plans and given a succinct account of the events that led up to the expulsion of the Imam and the triumph of the Republic. Time passes, another coffee arrives, we go on to discuss the politics of Sallal and Nasser, of the English and the Soviets; and finally, a scribe comes in with a large paper bag which he overturns on the table. It is the equivalent of a hundred dollars, that is a hundred silver *talleri* bearing the profile of Maria Theresa; each one weighs an ounce, or twelve grams. In Yemen, there are no banknotes; and these *talleri,* which are still coined today for Yemen by Swiss and Austrian minters, are the only money that serves as a medium of exchange in this country. I thank everyone, put the coins in a large handkerchief and leave the bank.

Later, I examine one of them. On one side is the portrait of Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria: an authoritarian nose, a double chin, full bosom, and hair piled on top of the head. On the other side is the two-headed eagle. On the edge of the coin is the motto of the paternalistic kingdoms of that period: *clementia et iustitia.* But what strikes me the most is the date: 1780. Nine years before the French Revolution, eleven years before the death of Mozart. If on the one hand, these coins serve as a reminder of the backwardness of the country in which they circulate, on the other hand they inspire a certain melancholy. They were coined in a time when European culture was at its peak, on the eve of military, political and economic expansion in our continent. From 1780, the year when they were coined, to today, Europe has undergone a process of disintegration and destruction. And the Yemen *talleri* are perhaps one of the last vestiges of its power in a world that is, by now, liberated from its guardianship.

San'a, February

Hugh Scott, an English entomologist who traveled in Yemen around 1935, sketched this small portrait of the Imam Yahya (complete name: Yahya Ibn Muhammad Al Mansur Ibn Yahya Hamid Ad Din), the old King of Yemen, father of the last Imam who ruled for only one week and then was de-throned by Colonel Sallal: "The Imam wore the turban that he had worn during the reception; but now the brocade vest had been substituted by the wide-sleeved, striped robe that the middle-class Yemen wear . . . At his left stood an old worn-looking

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chest with open drawers overflowing with papers. On the floor, all around the Imam, were piles of papers of every size and shape. The Imam went through these papers quickly, signing them and writing a few words on them and then tossing them to two or three scribes who were squatting on the floor in the middle of the room. These scribes stamped the papers with stamps which they dipped into two jars full of red and blue ink. At a certain point, a servant entered carrying a basket full of silver dollars. After being shown to the Imam, the money was piled up in heaps on the floor.

"So for an hour we remained in complete silence, before the King, while more and more bundles of papers were carried into the room in endless procession, rapidly taken care of by the Imam and then carried away again. Once the Imam looked up from his work and then I took advantage of the moment to thank him for having permitted us to visit the country. Occasionally, the Imam stopped signing papers to drink some water from a bottle wrapped in a wet cloth (to keep it cool). With every swallow, he shouted loudly: 'W'al Hamdu Lillah' (God be praised) . . . Finally he rose staring fixedly ahead and screamed at the top of his voice, 'In the name of God, the compassionate' and left the room."

To this portrait we can only add the fact that the Imam remained on the throne for forty years, during which Yemen was not only maintained in the conditions in which the Turks had left it (and it is known that the Ottoman Empire had been already immobile for at least two centuries), but probably, the Imam being much more reactionary than any Turkish governor, even slipped several steps backward. Atrocious stories are told about the Imam Yahya, most of them false, all intended to emphasize his tyrannical, capricious and fanatical character. We will limit ourselves to observing that he was in every way similar, with a few whims more or less, to any feudal lord of any Arab country during the Middle Ages. The Imam's only problem was that he was the perfect feudal lord of the Middle Ages in the middle of the twentieth century. In other words, the Imam was an anachronism, or a splinter of dead wood thrust into the live flesh of the present. This splinter paralyzed Yemen. Now, through the convulsion of Sallal's revolt, it has been cast out.

Therefore, Yemen was not, until yesterday, one of those backward countries, partly modern, partly old-fashioned, a depressed area in which there were both the disadvantages of a dying Middle Ages and those of a misunderstood and premature modernism. It was, instead, a fossil in an excellent state of conservation; and the customs and usages

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of the Middle Ages were not in a state of decadence but were maintained intact as in the year 1000. For this reason, a visit to Yemen, even today, constitutes a fascinating experience in that it permits you to see directly how people lived five hundred years ago or more.

Conservativism always makes a mistake when it keeps a populous in backward conditions and then permits it, through the press, the cinema, television, radio and tourism, to make comparisons. It is clear that nobody will willingly spend three days on a camel's back to cover a distance which he knows for certain is covered elsewhere in a few hours by car. It is probable that the Imam in spite of his ignorance and crudeness was aware of the inconveniences of enlightened tyranny. Therefore, every means of communication and information was barred from the Yemenites: no radio, no television, no cinema, no newspapers, no books. The country was forbidden to foreigners: no tourism, no commercial exchanges, no hotels. Furthermore, the Yemenites were not even supposed to communicate too often among themselves: no streets, no trains, no airplanes, the gates of the city closed from sunset to sunrise, a curfew, and safe-conduct to pass from one city to another. In the end, education is dangerous: no schools; ninety percent of the Yemenites were illiterate. What else? Since as Sun King, the Imam was identified with the state, his control of the public and private lives of his subjects was pervasive.

The result of this Yemen isolationism was twofold: on the one hand, the country remained immobile in relation to everything that is usually called progress; and this was an evil and produced incalculable damage. On the other hand, however, the Yemenites conserved (or at least they seem to have conserved) all the ingenuousness and freshness of a patriarchal civilization.

In contrast with the other Arab peoples, who are more crafty and corrupt because more advanced, the Yemenite people give an impression of candid, sometimes enchanting and always genuine provincialism. Certain traditional qualities of the desert-dwelling Arabs, such as courtesy, simplicity, dignity, boldness, seem better conserved here than elsewhere, along with a purity of Semitic features that makes every shepherd, every soldier, every artisan an exotic Oriental figure.

Nothing in Yemen can give a more intense feeling of the Middle Ages than the so-called rest-houses which, in the absence of hotels, are the only places where a traveler can hope to find lodging. Rest-house is an English word and designates a hostel managed by the colonialist state in countries like India and Africa, for the use of government

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officials obliged to travel in unfriendly zones. But the rest-houses of Yemen are rather like the medieval type inns described in *Don Quixote* and *The Decameron*. They are, in no way, modern hotels, but something else completely. In Yemen, the rest-houses are located, for the most part, in old gloomy buildings on the outskirts of the cities; for example, at San'a the rest-house is in an old Turkish ex-prison. Like the *Castello dell'Inominato* described in such minute detail by Manzoni, the rest-houses have, on the ground floor, an anteroom or porter's office which is, in reality, a guardroom: rifles, scimitars, cartridge belts, daggers hang from nails on the walls; various armed men (in Yemen it is very difficult to distinguish a soldier from a common citizen: both are armed more or less in the same way) are stretched out on the floor, on cushions or mats, or else seated around small tables on which tiny cups of coffee are set.

From the anteroom, you go up to the second floor on a roughly made staircase with immensely high steps. Here the traveler is shown into the reception room, the Yemenite version of the hall. It is a large rather squalid rectangular room with a close row of straight-backed chairs and easy chairs arranged around the walls as they are in a ballroom in the provinces. The furniture is Western; in one rest-house they were all in Louis XV style, ruthlessly curled and gilded. On the floor, large printed carpets; at the windows, fluttering curtains of flowered cretonne. The traveler sits down on an easy chair, sips the usual Turkish coffee and listens to the radio spill forth an uninterrupted and noisy stream of government propaganda. Finally, an individual in robe and turban (a director, a secretary, or merely a servant?) arrives to give a brief account of the situation in the rest-house. Well, the traveler can choose between two equally disagreeable alternatives: either to sleep with four other guests in a large room or to sleep alone in a small room in which, however, there are still all the belongings of someone who is away on a trip for the moment.

The traveler naturally chooses the second alternative if he is a foreigner; if he is a Yemenite, he'll probably choose the first; the Yemenites are sociable, affectionate and have a medieval inclination towards promiscuity. The traveler, following the servant who carries his bags, passes through the hall on which the doors of the bedrooms face. They are all wide open and inside you can see an expanse of unmade beds and men lying down on the covers, or sitting on the edge of their beds talking and drinking coffee. But here is the little room. Alas, it's very close to the bathroom and the least you can say about the bathrooms in the rest-houses is that they don't exactly emanate a perfume

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of violets. In addition, the room is a complete chaos of clothes hung on nails, dirty clothes rolled up, old slippers, socks stiff with perspiration, crumpled paper, newspapers, empty bottles, all the things that accumulate in a room that is very rarely cleaned. One of the window panes is broken; the sink provides nothing but the freezing cold water of the plain. A hasty examination of the rumpled sheets and their uncertain whiteness creates a feeling of doubt: either they were badly washed and not ironed or else somebody has already slept there. The traveler asks for a towel: a boy in a green and white striped robe and a blue turban, as beautiful and sweet as a young girl, brings him a cloth covered with smudges of black fingerprints. Patience.

Later, the traveler wanders through the rest-house waiting for dinner. As in medieval inns, the rest-house is a bustle of servants, scullery maids, boys; in the vast murky kitchen, around an immense black stove in which a red fire blazes, crackling like a blacksmith's forge, preparations advance in that particular patriarchal manner that Nievo has described so well in the pages dedicated to the Castello di Fratta. Meanwhile, the hungry guests wander through the halls chatting amiably, affectionately: this is a country in which men hold hands or link fingers and when they meet, they kiss each other on the cheek and on the mouth. Finally, the doors of the dining room open and the guests can enter. Still another medieval usage: there is only one long table at which the guests sit in two rows, like monks in the refectories of monasteries. The dining room is huge with a ceiling of gigantic whitewashed beams, all crooked and warped, and the walls painted with decorative red, green, blue and yellow motifs: it seems to belong in an abstract painting.

But here is the food. A group of servants goes around the table offering enormous trays heaped with substantial and traditional dishes: rice pilaf, stuffed egg plant, a fricassee of mutton with pieces of meat weighing up to ten and twelve ounces immersed in a thick dark sauce, potatoes roasted whole and other similar dishes, good though rather heavy. On the table arranged in nice order there are bowls of tomato and onion salad; the fruit course consists of a strange fruit that looks like a lemon and is instead an orange, but has the sweet taste of a tangerine. The guests eat in silence, in a kind of ritual hurry that does not exclude an occasional smile or gesture of greeting. They tell me that they are, for the most part, officials of the new government. The cities of Yemen were not prepared for this influx of exiles, of Egyptian officials of the expeditionary forces, of foreigners on business trips. The

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result is that the rest-houses are crowded and the traditional way of life in the time of the Imam no longer holds.

We have described the rest-houses because they are a typically medieval institution; but all of Yemen is still at the rest-house level, though only for a short time longer. Soon, very soon, Western neo-capitalism will arrive here with its experts, its bankers, its construction and business companies; and Yemen will become, as is desirable and right, a country like all the others. The Middle Ages of Yemen will be swept away by bull-dozers and reinforced cement. Unfortunately some unique aspects will disappear. It is to be hoped that a few of them will be preserved and incorporated into the revolution.

(*Translated by Carolyn Gaiser*)

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Daniel Bell

THE ALPHABET OF JUSTICE

REFLECTIONS ON "Eichmann In Jerusalem"

Hannah Arendt's book is about justice. In fact, as she says, "the purpose of a trial is to render justice, and nothing else." But this trial is about other things as well: about agony, cowardice, betrayal, shame, and, above all perhaps, vengeance. How can one write objectively about such things? All we can do is to respond and, in the way in which we respond, to identify ourselves, our qualities, and our commitments.

Both the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) and the Stoics held that Man, unrestrained, is a *behema,* a wild animal—the natural man of Rousseau and Freud before the appearance of the civil order or civilization—and that morality, rooted in conscience (or, in the Christian version, in guilt or sin), is insufficient to the task of restraint without the external force of law. Thus justice, in the first, tribal instance, has an awesome, retributive basis, barbaric as we may now think it to be. In the second, more disinterested, conception justice is rooted in the natural law, which demands of men penalties for the disruption of the moral order itself.

The reaction of many persons has been: Why raise such distinctions? The crime was so great and Eichmann's complicity, whether as major instigator or minor cog, was so clear, why not let the trial stand as a symbolic event? Why raise abstract questions such as whether Eichmann should have been tried for crimes against humanity, rather than for crimes against the Jewish people? The objection is a genuine one. It goes back to the root of one's identity, and one's root conception of the world.

One can see the world as a human community and man's quest as the difficult one of defining some permanently valid universal rules—either through some conception of natural law or some consensual international code. Or one can see the world as inevitably hostile and divided (from the orthodox point of view between Jews and *goyim*),

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in which survival is a precarious matter of toleration, bargaining, bribery or force.

The Israelis, having combined Jewish history with contemporary nationality, inevitably accept the latter view. Most of us—intellectual Jews who have grown up in *Galut* (exile) and live our lives as cosmopolitan beings—accept in varying degrees the unresolved and perhaps irreconcilable tension between parochial identities, with all its emotional tugs, and universal aspirations. Miss Arendt, at least as shown in her book, has cut all such ties: There is the unmoved quality of the Stoic, transcending tribe and nation, seeking only the single standard of universal order.

Her choice is made clear in the remarkable last pages of the book when she assumes the robes of a judge to sentence Eichmann in her own terms. She rejects any tribal or parochial identification, though she respects its open cry for vengeance. (Justice in that event she says might have been better served if Eichmann had been shot down directly in the streets of Buenos Aires—a direct act of retribution.) She despises the liberal flummery (particularly that of the Israeli prosecutor Gideon Hausner) which disguises its political or parochial motives by its high-flown talk of the "rule of law." In the garb of the Stoic she justifies the death penalty not because of crimes against the Jewish people but for a "crime against the very nature of mankind." ("The choice of victims . . . could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred," but for her it is the *act* not the *victim* which is salient.)

It is this unflinching desire to hew to a single standard, eliminating the questions of "motivation and conscience" because "guilt and innocence before the law are of an objective nature," that gives Miss Arendt's book its seeming coldness and even harshness of tone. From this "objective" standard, she judges not only Eichmann but the conduct of the trial and that of the Jews in Europe as well; and it is this double edge that has provoked so much rage in return. It is this emphasis on justice, too, which gives her judgments an abstract quality, a distancing which has been mistaken—cruelly, I believe—for an aesthetic judgment. Any singular emphasis on justice necessarily separates law from morality; it relegates the latter to a private sphere between persons, and gives the law a formal quality. Aesthetic judgments, deriving equally from a singular pre-occupation, are also separable from morality (behold the prize awards to Ezra Pound) and have a formal quality too. Thus the confusion.

All of this however, leads to two questions: in applying her uncompromising standard of justice, how fair has Miss Arendt been—

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to the Israelis, to the judgment of Eichmann, to the memory of the Jews murdered in Europe? and, second, how "adequate" is such a standard, not as a denial of the nature of justice, but as a response to the events themselves?

To be didactic is often to lose the excitement of a debate. Yet in the midst of so much controversy, and because of the gravity of the issues, one can keep one's bearings only in this way. Let me therefore, in dealing with the first of the two questions I have posed, divide it into four issues which seem to be at the heart of the "accusations" against Miss Arendt—accusations as extreme as that in the London *Observer,* which capitalized journalistically on the controversy while printing extracts from her book by saying that she "has been accused of being an anti-semite, a supporter of the Nazis and a brazen apologist for Eichmann."

These four issues are her observations on:

I. The conduct of the trial.
II. The Israeli motives.
III. The role of the Jewish community leadership in Europe.
IV. The character, and thus the "responsibility" of Eichmann.

I. THE CONDUCT OF THE TRIAL

Hannah Arendt has argued that the trial in Jerusalem was often a "show trial," at times even a "mass meeting," rather than a court for the administration of justice. In law, a man must be tried not for what he is, or for what he stands, but for what he did, and that alone. "This case was built on what the Jews had suffered, not on what Eichmann had done—according to Hausner this distinction was immaterial."[1] Thus, there were more than fifty "sufferings-of-the-peoples witnesses" whose testimony was irrelevant to any specific action of Eichmann's. The atmosphere was such that witness after witness sought to arouse the audience on "matters that had no connection whatever with the crimes of the accused."

"Justice demands that the accused be prosecuted, defended and judged and that *all other* questions of *seemingly* greater import . . . be left in abeyance." (My italics.) Of course, Miss Arendt does not leave them in abeyance—who can? But when she insists that what is primary, that what is "on trial are [Eichmann's] deeds, not the suffering

1. To save space and to avoid the tiresome repetition of "Miss Arendt said . . ." or "Miss Arendt declared . . ." let it be understood that all quotations, unless otherwise stated, are by Miss Arendt.

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of the Jews, not the German people or mankind, not even anti-Semitism and racism," she is negating her own conclusion as well.

We can admit and deplore the histrionics and excesses of Hausner; they did detract from the extraordinary uniqueness of the trial. But one should not confuse such theatrics with the question of *who* was on trial and the rationale of the indictment. For both the Israelis and Miss Arendt treated Eichmann as a symbol. And it is there that the first issue is joined, and blurred.

Of what is Eichmann a symbol? Of anti-semitism, surely. Of Nazism, certainly. That is easy. But what was Nazism? And what was this particular anti-semitism? Something uniquely aberrant? An element of German national character, involving, therefore, the guilt of *all* Germans? An aspect of all gentiles, and therefore endemic in Christian history? A recurrent malady of human aggression? Eichmann, for the Israelis, was seemingly all of these, but there was never a clear effort to identify the interplay of these elements, for these historical and sociological questions were ultimately subordinate to a political motive in holding the trial, and in politics one can't always say what one believes. (Can one say that one does not trust any gentiles or any Germans?)

In her own way, Miss Arendt treats Eichmann as a symbol, too. But her circle is more cleanly joined: he is an individual, Adolf, son of Karl, Eichmann; but he is also Everyman. The partial identities as German and gentile which were crucial for the Israelis are irrelevant for her. Eichmann was only an "average person," neither "perverted nor sadistic," only "terribly and terrifyingly normal." And what the case did bring out was the question of "how long it takes an average person to overcome his innate repugnance toward crime, and what exactly happens to him once he has reached that point." (In the case of Eichmann, four weeks of wrestling with his conscience.)

Thus, even for Miss Arendt, though the trial by the canons of justice should have dealt with an individual, Eichmann was historically a "new type of criminal"—one who upsets "the assumption current in all modern legal systems that intent to do wrong is necessary for the commission of a crime," and so, who cannot be tried by the norms of positive law which have prevailed, and which the Israelis sought to employ. No intention to do wrong was present, argues Miss Arendt, not because Eichmann was following orders—all soldiers do so—but because Eichmann was obeying a different kind of law; and the definition of this law leads us, as do so many other questions in the book, back to her conception of totalitarianism.

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In short, in dealing with the conduct of the trial, though Miss Arendt is convincing about the lachrymose excesses in the courtroom—yet given the cirmumstances could such emotionalism have been avoided?—her real quarrel is not with the conduct of the trial but with the nature of the indictment. And that is a far different issue, which I shall discuss in a different context.

II. THE ISRAELI MOTIVE

It is quite clear that the Israelis intended to try Eichmann not as a person, but as a symbol. Before the trial Ben-Gurion said, "It is not an individual that is in the dock at his historic trial, and not the Nazi regime alone, but anti-semitism throughout history."

The motives behind the Israelis intention were several: to demonstrate to the world the fate of the Jews, and so establish a lien on the conscience of nations as a means of defending the Israeli state; to demonstrate to the Jews in *Galut* the debilitating quality of life in the Diaspora, led as a minority existence; to demonstrate to the Israelis the validity of the Zionist answer as the restoration of Jewish heroism.

The Israeli leadership today is a tough-minded group with few illusions about the idealism of the Powers. They are prepared—for the sake of survival—to engage in preventive war and to commit provocations. (The Lavon affair is a striking instance. Some years ago, Israeli intelligence agents in Cairo set fire to a U.S. information agency building, in order to blame the Egyptians for the act and arouse anti-Nasser sentiment in the U.S. When the plot miscarried, members of the Israeli service forged papers to demonstrate that Pinchas Lavon, then Minister of Defense, had approved of the action. Lavon was forced to resign and, although he was subsequently cleared over the opposition of Ben-Gurion, his political career was ruined. For more than a year, Israeli censorship prevented any discussions of the story and the full details are still not clear today. For a people scarred by the Dreyfus case, the Lavon affair poses a painful question on the relationship of morality to political expediency.) The Eichmann trial, with its potential boomerangs—the unbearable recollections it would provoke about the submissiveness of so many Jewish victims, and the dilemmas arising from the inescapable revelations that the present German government is supplying arms to the Israelis—was embedded in all these political calculations.

Miss Arendt's criticism of the Israeli motives—one of the very few to probe so openly and strongly on those points—was bound to

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create a storm of resentment in the Jewish community. For she posed—and still does—the humanly perplexing tension between the application of different standards.

The Israeli motive, for Miss Arendt, was "ideological (using the word in the original analytic sense) in that it masked an underlying parochial intention with the facade of a universal claim; and some of the Israeli fury against her derives from her insistence that political advantage, rather than the ends of justice, shaped the government's conduct of the trial. Whatever one feels of the theoretical arguments about the framing of the indictment, there is a critique of "practical" judgment which runs through Miss Arendt's book, and it is those observations, rather than the questions of the nature of the indictment that have provoked the storm of controversy.

Her judgments derive, obliquely, from her argument that it was a mistake to charge Eichmann with "crimes against the Jewish people," not only because such a charge deflects from the significantly different crime (the "disruption of the moral order"), but because such an indictment reduces the culpability of Eichmann, and, equally, involves the question of the role of the Jewish community leaders in the crimes themselves. And it is this latter issue which is the eye of the storm.

III. THE JEWISH LEADERSHIP

Let it be said first that the question is not why the Jews failed to resist: The history of the war shows that mass resistance, without outside support, was virtually impossible, and in almost all instances no outside support from the allied governments was forthcoming. Individual resistance, or that of small groups, was met with such savage reprisals that the phrase emerged *"besser Todt ohne Schrecklichkeit, als Schrecklichkeit ohne Todt."* (Better a death without torture, than a torture without death.)

The heart of the issue is summed up in Miss Arendt's sweeping judgment: "Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, co-operated in one way or another with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four-and-a-half and six million people."

Enough evidence has been cited to show that this was not the "whole truth." But is it a question of numbers? Is it enough to say that this was true of Germany or Hungary but not of sections of Poland or of Belgium? There were dozens of communities where such

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councils did "co-operate;" and this cooperation was regarded by the Nazis as the cornerstone of their Jewish policy. It is true, for example, that in Russia there was no organized Jewish community, and almost the entire community of leaderless Russian Jewry was still wiped out. But in Russia the Nazis embarked on a policy of wholesale shootings, often, as Alex Dallin has pointed out in his *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945,* making little distinction between Jews and Russians. In the other countries, the Nazis set out to round up, tag, classify and arrange time-schedules for deportation to the death camps and to confiscate, in orderly fashion, the assets of the Jewish community. And in such instances, cooperation facilitated their task.

A different point, perhaps, is that what could have been left as historical fact or evaluation is converted by Miss Arendt into a moral judgment and opprobrium. And this is more difficult to accept. The effort by various Jewish community leaders, such as Rabbi Leo Baeck of Berlin, to ease the plight of their members may have been a terrible mistake, but it is an understandable one; and who can set himself up as judge?

What is apparent, in retrospect, both as moral value and sociological truth, is that victims should not cooperate with their executioners. Where resistance was possible, as in Denmark, the Nazis gave way. The historical point, perhaps, is that European Jewry, especially in the West, had become bourgeois and had lost the sense of solidarity of the people. In Holland, for example, the Jewish Council came into being on the assumption that only "foreign Jews" would be deported. In Germany, Jews sought to attain privileged status as war veterans or decorated Jews against ordinary Jews, as families whose ancestors were German-born against those recently naturalized, or as German Jews against Polish Jews. The only memorable resistance was in Poland where the ideological orientation and the proletarian outlook had been shaped by the Bund and the Socialist Zionists. But all this is a lesson for the living, not for the dead.

IV. EICHMANN

Central to the trial—and to our conception of human nature and politics—is the enigma of Eichmann, the man and the Nazi. For Gideon Hausner, "there was only one man who had ever been almost entirely concerned with the Jews, whose business had been their destruction" and that was the "perverted sadist," the "monster," Adolf Eichmann.

It would be comfortable for all of us if this were true. Then we could believe that such behavior was aberrant, that Hitlerism and

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even Stalinism, death camps, purge trials, degradation through forced confession, were the work of madmen who, in unique circumstances, had seized control of the machinery of a modern state, and who, with some kindred henchmen, had terrorized the other normal persons into silence and even acquiescence. If all this were so, we could then settle back once more in an optimistic belief about human nature and spin out our utopian dreams. Then evil could again be seen as something "other," as something cunning, mephitic or surrealistic, the conjuring of literary romancers like Lautreamont who in his *Chants de Maldorer* narrates a "career of evil" through the incantations of sadism. But the reality of evil, as Simone Weil once noted, is that it is "gloomy, monotonous, barren, and boring," because evil, when done, is felt not as evil, but as a necessity or a duty. And this was the evil of Adolf Eichmann.

Adolf Eichmann was the *declassé* son of an Austrian middle class family (his father was a lawyer) who joined the Nazi party after he had been fired from a humdrum job as a traveling salesman for the Vacuum Oil Co. He did not join as a zealot or a convert; in fact, he had at the same time joined the Freemasons' Lodge Schlaraffia ("from *Schlaraffenland,* the gluttons' Cloud-Cuckoo Land of German fairy tales") and had been expelled from the Lodge just as his Nazi sponsor, Ernst Kaltenbrunner (a friend of his father's, and later the chief of the Head Office for Reich Security) told him that membership in the two was incompatible. When Eichmann joined the Security Service, he was under the impression that he would be guarding the high Party officials, and that his job would consist of standing on the running board of their shiny cars as they wound through the street demonstrations. In all this, he was truly Hans Fallada's white-collar clerk in *Little Man, What Now?*

How did Eichmann happen to change, or did a change even take place at all? Adolf Hitler once wrote in his manual on rhetoric that mass demonstrations "must burn into the little man's soul the proud conviction that though a little worm he is nevertheless part of a great dragon." Eichmann was not a cog or a wheel in the machine—such an image is too mechanical and fails to realize the way human beings respond to situations that give outlet to their hunger and fantasies—in this case, of importance and omnipotence. He saw his opportunities and he jumped to them with alacrity. And he had a *Fuehrer,* a legitimation (the Nazi concept of race superiority), and a system that allowed him to act out his puffed-up dragon pride. One other ingredient completed the role: like Caliban, he was given "speech," the *Amtsprache*

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or officialese, ("Amtsprache is my only language," he said)—and was thus provided with a stock of phrases and explanations which shielded him from any other reality. (As François Bondy has said, in a most memorable phrase, *"der Stil ist der Unmensch."*)

Eichmann became the Nazi expert on Jewish organizations. Before the war, during the phase of the "first solution," he "saved" thousands of Jews by co-operating with the Zionists to speed the able Jews out of Germany. "It was not until the outbreak of the war, on September 1, 1939, that the Nazi regime became openly totalitarian and openly criminal," Miss Arendt writes. The point is crucial, for the war closed off all exits for the Jews, it allowed Hitler to put into effect his "final solution," and it created a different psychological atmosphere—of fatalism and even resignation—about death; as Eichmann put it, "dead people are seen everywhere" and "everyone looked forward to his own death with indifference. . . ."

The decision to press for the "final solution" was taken at the Wannsee conference in January 1942. It necessitated the active co-operation of all ministers and the entire civil service. As Eichmann said: Here the most prominent people, the Popes of the Third Reich, the elite of the civil service were vying with each other to take the lead. "At that moment, I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt."

But can people actively engaged in murder find release or assuasion so easily? How do they handle the frightening emotions generated by a blood ritual? For primitive peoples there is always the communal purgation, but modern men need subtler deceptions. They handle it, as Eichmann and the Nazis did—and here, I think, Miss Arendt's at her most brilliant—by "distancing" themselves from the events, by the use of "language rules" (*Sprachregelung*).

In the first war decree of Hitler, for example, the word for "murder" was replaced by the phrase "to grant a mercy death." And in the "objective" language of the Nazis, concentration camps were discussed in terms of "economy"; killing was a "medical matter." All official correspondence was subject to these "language rules" and as Miss Arendt point out, "it is rare to find documents in which such bald words as 'extermination,' 'liquidation,' or 'killing' occur. The prescribed code names for killing were 'final solution,' 'evacuation' (*Aussiedlung*), and 'special treatment' (*Sonderbehandlung*)." Deportation was called "change of residence" and in the case of Theresienstadt, the special camp for privileged Jews, "resettlement."

We have here (as with some aspects of modern linguistic philo-

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sophy), the end of the "categorical logic of language" which unites words and the world. Reality is now set afloat, to be grotesque or absurd, a self-contained "game" in which the function of the rules is to disguise, not to bound, events. One finds this not only among the Nazis, but in the most variegated areas of life where the purpose is to avoid the direct confrontation with ugly experience. In his description of the "Cosa Nostra," Joseph Valachi remarked on the witness stand: "Genovese told me that Bender had disappeared." "Did you take that to mean that Bender had been killed?" asked Senator McClellan. Valachi nodded and said, "It meant in our language that he had ordered his death."

But a disguise is not enough. Ordinary men have to feel some sense of higher purpose to engage in such conscience-provoking acts, and the function of the slogans and catch-phrases, such as "the battle of destiny" (which Eichmann called "winged words") was to submerge the sense of individual responsibility in some cosmic enterprise. "What stuck in the minds of these men who had become murderers was simply the notion of being involved in something historic, grandiose, unique ('a great task that occurs once in two thousand years'), which must therefore be difficult to bear." It is the same device that Bert Brecht used explicitly in *Die Massnahme,* which he wrote shortly after becoming a Communist in 1930 ("What vileness would you not commit to root out the vile. . . . Sink down in the slime/Embrace the butcher /But change the world. . . .") to justify the murder of weak-kneed comrades.

The point of all this—the heart of the argument—is that ordinary men, men like Eichmann, can easily become part of a system which will wipe out entire populations as superfluous, not in the manner of the Mongol hordes (there, at least, a primitive utilitarianism was at work) but as a projection of unconscious impulses onto secular ideologies. Lacking any restraint, "everything is possible" to men in the pursuit of an Idea.

At stake is the meaning of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is not just the pulverization of private life, the destruction of society by the State, so to speak—this is never wholly possible, and soon breaks down —but the creation of an ideology—"Race" or "History" speaking through the Fuehrer or the Party—which serves as the rule of higher law. Old-fashioned despotism was the arbitrary will of a single man with no legitimation beyond superior force or tradition. The strength of totalitarian movements consists in creating a legitimation which overrides not only ordinary morality about lying, cheating, stealing but

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reduces the scruple against murder to a petty-bourgeois sentimentality. And totalitarian society differs from militarized regimes—and from previous despotisms—by creating a new form of compliance to its ends. Just as the Christian sense of sin forced men to internalize guilt as conscience, and to substitute self-regulation for external restraints, so the totalitarian belief instills in its followers a guilt-free sanction which replaces conscience with the higher end.

It is quite unlikely that any *society* can be totalitarian for long, since the diverse desires of men cannot be harnessed to a single end without some strong allegiance, an enemy in wartime, or compliance through terror. But what the "rediscovery of evil" showed—the preoccupation in the decade of the fifties with Kierkegaard, Simone Weil, Camus, Tillich, Niebuhr and Barth—was that a truth which had been throught to be historical and political was, *au fond,* metaphysical. The frightening prospect it disclosed was that, given the structural tendencies of modern societies to centralize power and to manipulate vast numbers of men through the agencies of state coercion, the totalitarian potential was an ever-recurrent one.

V. THE PAROCHIAL AND THE UNIVERSAL

All of this leads to the point which, *in intention,* was the pivot of Miss Arendt's book—that the Israelis failed to understand the uniquely new nature of the crimes committed, a failure reflected in the indictment of Eichmann as instigating crimes against the Jewish people. For the Israelis, Nazism was one of the long procession of brutalities committed within the tradition of anti-semitism. For Miss Arendt the Nazi crimes, the rationalized murder of entire populations, is the beginning of a new set of fearful possibilities in human history.

The point was anticipated a dozen years ago in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*: "The chances for eventual success of totalitarianism are slimmer still if we remember that almost no system has ever been less capable of gradually expanding its sphere of influence. . . . [But] the totalitarian attempt to make men superfluous reflects the experience of modern masses of their superfluity on an overcrowded earth."

And the point is taken up as the rationale for her argument in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: "The particular reasons that speak for the possibility of a repetition of the crimes committed by the Nazis are even more plausible. The frightening coincidence of the modern population explosion with the discovery of technical devices that, through automation, will make large sections of the population 'superfluous' even in terms of labor, and that, through nuclear energy make it possible to

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deal with this twofold treat by the use of instruments [e.g. fusion bombs] beside which Hitler's gassing installations look like an evil child's fumbling toys, should be enough to make us tremble.

"It is essentially for this reason: that the unprecedented, once it has appeared, may become a precedent for the future, that all trials touching upon 'crimes against humanity' must be judged according to a standard that is still an 'ideal.' "

In short, Miss Arendt insisted that the Israelis, in trying Eichmann in a Jewish court and on specifically Jewish issues, missed a crucial point of modern history. Moreover, by kidnapping Eichmann in Argentina and thus extending the territorial principle of seizure beyond its borders, a precedent was created for the breakdown of international law whereby in the future, for example, an African state could kidnap a segregationist leader in America and try him in Ghana or Guinea for crimes against the black people. For her, the Israeli mistake was to be parochial at a time when the problem of mass murder had become universal.

It is this tension between the parochial and the universal that explains the furious emotions over Miss Arendt's book. For she writes from the standpoint of a universal principle which denies any parochial identity. It is this which gives her exposition a cold force and an abstract quality. But one senses, too, a recoil from the fact that Israel has become one nation among the many, no different in its morality and vulgarity from all the others; and she is harsh about these features. But the events concern more than Israel, though Israel conducted the trial. The Israelis are a nationality, but the Jews remain a people, and the experiences of the race are the shaping elements of one's identity. One feels that while many of Miss Arendt's strictures are correct—if one can live by a universalistic standard—her response to the unbearable story reduces a tragic drama to a philosophical complexity. Can one exclude the existential person as a component of the human judgment? In this situation, one's identity as a Jew, as well as *philosophe,* is relevant.

The agony of Miss Arendt's book is precisely that she takes her stand so unyieldingly on the side of disinterested justice, and that she judges both Nazi and Jew. But abstract justice, as the Talmudic wisdom knew, is sometimes too "strong" a yardstick to judge the world.

In the Talmudic *Haggadah* (the sections of legends and parables, as distinct from *Halacha,* or the law) there is a homiletic story, the "alphabet of creation," which is learned by all youngsters who embark on the study of the "word." The question is: Why did God begin the

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world with the letter "B." The boy who begins to recite the Torah rushes past the opening word of Genesis, *Bereshit,* to show how well he can read. But the Rabbi halts him. God is not a capricious God. To undertake such an awesome task as creating the world is not to be done lightly. Why the letter "B?" Each letter of the alphabet, eager to have the glory of initiating the world, presses its claim before the Lord. *Taw* steps forth and points out that Moses will give the law (Torah) to Israel, and thus the "T" is pre-eminent; but God points out that *Taw* will also be placed on the foreheads of men as a sign of death. *Shin* pleads that it stands for *Shaddai,* one of the ineffable names of the Lord; but it also stands for *Shaw* which is a lie, and the world cannot begin so compromised. Among the letters, *Daled* presses its case, but as the Talmud points out, "If *Daled* had stood only for *Dabar,* the Divine Word, it would have been used, but it stands also for *Din,* justice, and under a law of justice, without love, the world would fall to ruin." And why "B?" The letter Beth stands for Baruch, which means blessing, and "blessed be the Lord forever."

(*Daniel Bell's piece continues the discussion of Hannah Arendt's book,* Eichmann in Jerusalem, *dealt with in the last issue. For reasons of space, we have had to put off the publication of several letters about Lionel Abel's essay and a reply by Mr. Abel.*)

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LETTER FROM LONDON

THE SILLY SEASON

High Summer, in England, is known as the Silly Season, when the pages of the Press are filled traditionally with picturesque trivialities. In the great world outside, the foundations of our lives may rock, but we remain true to our pre-autumnal passion for frivolity. (It is instructive, for example, to re-read the London papers of High Summer, 1939: never would you have guessed the British Empire stood on the verge of its catastrophe.)

This year, the harvest of futility has been rich; and to our Press, the Great Train Robbery has been a godsend. I am sorry to report that the British, usually severe in their judgments of criminals—and especially of crimes against property, rather than against the person—have reacted on the whole light-heartedly to this episode.

To begin with, the sum—£2½ millions—is so enormous. Stealing a car, or a measurable sum of money, is something popular imagination can grasp, and so condemn. But a theft so vast carries the whole exploit into the realm of legendary fantasy. I once asked the late Howard Samuel, my publisher, who was also a socialist property millionaire, if he could really tell the difference between one million pounds and two. He replied with some asperity that he most certainly could—but to most of us such figures, when so huge, are quite identical.

And then there is the *train*: that Night Mail hurtling through the darkness with its Ali Baba's cave of loot on board, and not even an old-age pensioner to guard it! Which of us has not dreamed of tampering with something so majestic and impregnable as an express train—and a Royal Mail at that?

Then there is that the money has been pillaged from *banks*; and nobody, I believe, loves banks very much. They have spent large sums of late trying to project an endearing image of themselves on the public mind, yet the popular suspicion lingers that whereas others labor and take risks, the banks will never be the losers in any deal.

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Then yet again this money was insured. Now, insurance is an admirable institution, yet it unquestionably has made theft seem less wicked than in the days before it, when a man could be ruined by a robbery. Additionally, it is well known that insurance companies are, in fact, licensed and scientific gamblers, placing odds against fate at most profitable rates; and when fate betrays them, nobody is really sorry.

There can be little doubt, in general, that this *coup* heralds the entry of English crime into its industrial era. The professional core of English criminals—perhaps no more than 5 percent of the total of what are known as the "criminal classes"—are becoming increasingly well organized technically and, above all, well financed, so that the planning of the theft, the leisurely disposal of the loot, and the social security of families of any of the robbers who may fall by the wayside, can be more efficiently looked after. And the chief fear of the authorities, in the present instance, is not just that £2½ millions of unearned income injected into the economy is inflationary, but that this huge sum will be used to finance further large-scale thefts. Hence the enormous reward (10 percent of the sum stolen) offered to informers and potential traitors; and the joyful atmosphere of a treasure hunt that surrounds the initiatives of the general public in trying to track down this horde of stolen notes.

Has the Hal Woolf affair been reported in the American Press—or has it been swamped by more sensational items emanating from our sedate group of islands? Hal Woolf, whom I knew well, was a competent neo-academic portrait painter, with a wide circle of bohemian friends who felt for him great affection; and last November, Hal disappeared in London. Thanks to the persistent inquiries of his former wife—with whom he had remained on excellent terms—it transpired that he had been knocked down by a car in Park Lane, slightly injured, and admitted to a hospital. There the doctors discovered he had in his possession Indian hemp, and the police were informed and arrested him on his discharge from medical care.

Shortly after this, he was re-admitted into another hospital specializing in brain surgery, where he died after some days, with police officers at his bedside. Despite his wife's having already initiated police inquiries, she was not informed of his hospitalization until after his death had occurred. When she identified the body, she found his head badly mutilated.

Spurred at last by Press interest (initiated by the indefatigable

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Claud Cockburn), the government ordered an inquiry—but a police inquiry into a matter in which police behavior seemed to be much involved. As to what may have happened, there are two theories. The police one, predictably, is that Hal Woolf was more gravely injured than was suspected at the first hospital, and had to be re-admitted for brain surgery after his arrest by them—when they say he "became ill" in the police cells—which surgery would account for his mutilated appearance after death. The theory of the suspicious is that something must have happened to him in Savile Row police station between his two hospitalizations to account for the graver injuries that led to his death, for police silence about his being in the hospital, and for the presence of police officers at his death bed.

These suspicions arise partly from the fact that a "purge" of Indian hemp smokers is at present being conducted by the Vice Squad. This addiction has now become quite general in various "fringe" circles, and is not unconnected with the Afro-Caribbean presence here —though the Cypriots and Maltese also make their modest contribution. Unfortunately, in the public mind there is confusion between hemp addiction and that to really dangerous drugs like morphia and heroin; whereas in fact the hemp world and the junkie world move on quite different levels, and it is just as unusual for a hemp smoker to be "turned onto" junk as it is for a liquor boozer so to be. However, hemp smoking is of course illegal, and since addiction to real junk on a commercial scale is also regrettably increasing—that is, among persons who are not the "registered addicts" whom our laws permit to secure modest supplies from a doctor—public feeling against hemp is equally severe. Hal Woolf, though an admitted addict, led an otherwise normal and socially blameless life, as I can testify; yet since he was a "weed" smoker, some sections of the public feel that if the police stepped out of line, they were entitled to do so in view of the menace of "dangerous drugs" in general.

Yet the police are having a bad press at the moment, and it looks as if the hallowed myth that English coppers never use violence, perjury, framing of suspects—let alone participate in crimes—is at last being shattered in the public mind. Now, what has been foolish about this legend is not that coppers *do* do these things—as all police forces do and must—but that national vanity led many to suppose that our coppers were far nicer men than any others. If the public—and more specially juries—know what "police methods" really are, this fact will

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not alter these methods in the least, but will perhaps insure that charges against any accused person are considered with some realism.

In the Ward trials, there can now be no doubt that undue pressure was used by the police both to insure that hostile witnesses should be present—by bringing frivolous charges against some, and fixing enormous sums as bail—and by telling others who were vulnerable what they were, and were not, to say. A self-declared prostitute who gave damning testimony against Ward (and later withdrew it, greatly to her credit) appeared recently on television and told the astonished viewers what threats had been used by the police to insure that when she entered the witness box she said what the prosecution wanted. It was impossible to watch this interview without becoming convinced that this woman was now telling the truth; and equally impossible to heed the soothing platitudes of the retired police officer who followed her on the screen to assure us that such mis-practices are alien to English police behavior.

Nor has that other great shibboleth of English mythology—that our justice, like our whisky, marmalade and chocolate biscuits, is second to none in quality—survived recent occurrences. Lord Denning, a judge, is at present undertaking a massive enquiry into the whole Profumo affair and its ramifications. To this task, he has been appointed by the Prime Minister. But is it right and sensible, we must ask, that a judge, removed from the panoply and objectivity of his court, should be employed by a politician to investigate a matter in which other politicians of his party may well be involved? And since his report, whatever its content, is bound to be controversial, is it wise that a judge should descend from the impartiality of his bench to swim in the murky political ocean? In brief, the feeling is general that the essential separation of function between judiciary and legislature is being blurred, and that the government is using the prestige of judges to whitewash their own supposed misdeeds.

When the appeal of Aloysius "Lucky" Gordon, a Caribbean, against his conviction for assaulting Christine Keeler was recently allowed, the Lord Chief Justice declined to let the written evidence on which his decision was based to be read out in public court—though he did allow the defense counsel to see it. A case has thus been decided by justice no doubt being done, but certainly not being seen to be done. This Chief Justice is the same legal luminary who, at the time of the Vassall tribunal, rebuked a reluctant witness for not putting the interests of the State above all other interests. For adhering precisely to this doctrine,

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the judges at Nuremberg (two of them British) condemned the Nazi leaders in the most categorical terms.

English judges are drawn from a minute minority of about 2,000 barristers—that is, lawyers who plead in court, and do not initiate contact with the client, which is done by the non-pleading solicitors. During their youth, they argue cases this way or that for fees but, once be-wigged as judges, assume enormous powers (and income) since much English law is created not by parliament, but by justices' interpretations of its enactments. The feeling is growing that these immensely privileged persons are assuming an increasingly administrative, rather than interpretative, function; and that their powers are growing as that of an elected parliament declines.

The aforementioned national gadfly Claud Cockburn startled everyone recently by printing full particulars of the man he alleged to be Head (capital letters) of our Secret Services. In America, everyone knows who runs the CIA or FBI, but in England the identities of their opposite numbers are shrouded in becoming mystery. Yet why should we not know who these men are? Our Secret Services are responsible only, and directly, to the prime minister, and it is inconceivable that this busy man should be able to control this vast bureaucracy, which means that it is in fact operated anonymously, and largely without democratic control.

Like everyone else in World War II, I drifted for a while into the periphery of this occult organization, and was much impressed by two things about it. First, the undoubted brains of many of its officers (people who could crack codes before breakfast, for example), and next by the temperamental *boyishness* of these gifted men. The upper hierarchies of English life (civil service, judiciary, universities) are exclusively staffed by gentlefolk, and the Secret Services are no exception. One may doubt most earnestly whether such persons are either devoted to democratic processes or as politically mature as they need to be in 1963. That overgrown sexless schoolboy, James Bond, is usually thought to be a parody of what secret servicemen really are. It is alarming to reflect that the creator of these fantasies may in fact be a realist.

Of all the social sewage that the Profumo affair has dredged up to assail our nostrils, the most repellent have been the revelations of how slum landlords operate in the center of our capital. All visitors here will have noticed the glass and concrete palaces that newly adorn London, but perhaps not so many will have visited the insalubrious

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areas where the seamier kind of property dealer has been operating at huge profits.

Chief among these are London W. 11 and W. 12, now known as Rachmansland, in dishonor of the memory of the lover of Mandy Rice-Davies, now deceased, whose satrapy this sinister area was. I have described this district in two novels (*Absolute Beginners* and *Mr. Love & Justice*) and my report, of five years ago now, was greeted at the time with incredulity. This zone largely consists of vast bourgeois terraces, put up by Victorian speculative builders, which the bourgeoisie never cared for, so that they soon fell into decline and were sublet in flats and single rooms.

Tenants of long standing are protected by law from evictions, but such is the pressure on housing in the capital—and so convenient is this area to whores and gangsters (not to mention harassed colored immigrants)—that every device was used by Rachman and his associates to buy out, or frighten out, sitting tenants, so that the rooms could then be let far more advantageously. This happened on a colossal scale, and may have been one of the factors leading to the race riots of 1958. For not only were many of the older cheap-rate tenants replaced by immigrants paying three or four times as much for the same premises, but one of Rachman's stratagems was to install ebullient Caribbeans in a poor white house so as to scare out the more timid of the older tenantry.

In surprising—and heartening—reaction to these tactics, a number of grass-root tenants' associations came into being to fight together for the victims' rights. At the time of penning this, one Mrs. Cobb, a barman's wife, who is apparently in arrears with her rent, is resisting a siege by the landlord's bailiffs from behind barbed wire, through which food is passed to her daily by sympathetic neighbors. But I predict that such occurrences will become more infrequent, for the latest tactic of the landlords is to reconvert their premises in this area yet another time, and turn them back into what they were intended to be in the first place—substantial houses and flats for the middle classes. For the lettings to semi-criminal tenants have, since the recent fuss, become too perilous, and the demand for suitable bourgeois properties is still high.

"Direct action" of the kind adopted by the tenants' associations may not be unconnected with the recent marked upsurge of anarchism among the young—in their tactics, that is, if not always in their conscious philosophy. This should not really surprise us, for it is often

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forgotten that the founding father of anarchism, William Godwin, the father-in-law of Shelley, was an Englishman, and that such anarchist worthies as Kropotkin, Bakunin and Malatesta all visited our shores—Peter Kropotkin for over thirty years. *Freedom,* the anarchist weekly, founded by Kropotkin and the Fabians 70 years ago, still appears buoyantly, and is remarkably uninhibited in its political commentaries and revelations. For nearly two years a more thoughtful journal, *Anarchy,* has now come out monthly, and it seems to me to get nearer to the core of many of our social ills than periodicals of far higher circulation. It has also recruited an able cohort of well-informed and vigorous young writers, though fuddy-duddies like myself occasionally contribute to it (Freedom Press, 17A Maxwell Road, London S.W. 6).

Anarchism is, of course, profoundly opposed both to Communism and to party democracy as we know it, since it deems both to be authoritarian and state-worshipping, as opposed to the concept of voluntary co-operative effort in all social and political spheres dear to anarchist ideology. I expect that its appeal to the young arises from their being disabused with all the classic political parties, and to its libertarian and egalitarian moral climate. It is certainly the only party of the left (sorry, not "party," for an "anarchist party" is a contradiction in terms —one simply *becomes* an anarchist, one does not "join") which has hit out in all directions, at one moment manifesting against Bombs —Russian, American or British, the next invading that hallowed ground of the Left, the Cuban embassy in London, and demonstrating against the retention of political prisoners in Castro's jails.

This movement shows the disillusionment with orthodox politics at the radical, or positive extreme. But in other ways, all the "affairs" referred to in this letter denote, I think, a growing disenchantment of all kinds of people with party government. Often, of course, this attitude is cynical and irresponsible, and falls into the fatal fallacy of supposing that the government are They, and the public We, and that neither is responsible for the other. Certainly, the glee with which the British nation has gobbled up all the muck that has been raked over in the past few months is far from reassuring. For comment on these scandals has suggested that the patient does not seem to have recognized his own malady; and that many Englishmen and women see these events as if they were happening not to ourselves, but to some imaginary alien country.

Colin MacInnes

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BOOKS

THE PUBLIC POET

A PRECOCIOUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY. By Evgeny Evtushenko. Translated by Andrew R. McAndrew. E. P. Dutton. $3.50.

The underlying question may be this: to what degree is the rebel disfigured by the spurious culture he seeks to change; to what extent is he formed by the world he would transform? How much of Bolshevism's centralism is a translation of Tsarist autocracy? Abram Tertz traps his schoolboy rebel in the cruellest of ironies in his story "The Trial Begins"; what would he do with those who "hurt the feelings" of their fellow men? Shoot them! Evtushenko's self-justifying book bears many marks of the immediate past, but the "autobiographical" data are so scanty and so obviously chosen (or invented) for tactical purposes that there is no ready answer to the larger question.

The book defends his views on art, attacks his enemies, "the dogmatists," invokes a number of routine Russian myths in his own support and aims finally, one must suppose, at advancing his own cause. Its effects were to be immediate, as Khrushchev recognized when he denounced it.

The tactical questions loom larger, and invite speculation about Evtushenko's motives in publishing it, and in publishing it as he did, in a Paris weekly. Although it was no doubt meant to be overheard back home, it was addressed to the West. Having chosen to publish it in *L'Express,* he knew that it would not be brought out at home, and that it meant some personal danger to himself. It is safe to assume that he felt that everything he stood for was endangered by the sensational speculations about him in the Western press. It was better, perhaps, to risk personal trouble at home in order to save others from a crackdown brought on by continuous scandal abroad. There might have been two other considerations: to give his Western audience an authoritative version of himself and of his views; to maintain continuous access to the West, principally to create a source of intelligent and well informed support. Thus the first thing to communicate was the special nature of his loyalty to the Revolution: it is unequivocal and

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entirely Leninist. Once he had discovered the Stalinist fraud, it meant going back to the true faith, and then forward to its realization in the name of the Truth and the People. The declaration of faith is banal enough, but the point is for us to understand that is is one of the rules of the game. This is not to accuse Evtushenko of insincerity. It is part of our responsibility to realize that in a world without guaranteed rights of any kind, the human intelligence is engaged in a total war the moment it asserts the right to exist. Not to be strategic would be to surrender *a priori,* on purist grounds. That Evtushenko is involved in this battle, we may not doubt.

Armed against the strategems, then, but never really certain what Evtushenko's final commitments are, the reader may try to identify the myths Evtushenko has invoked to justify himself in the East and to explain himself in the West.

The poet as a public figure has a special history in Russia. He has often been cast as culture-hero, or divine *literatus* speaking to multitudes, or a martyr to the Philistines, or as some combination of the three. Pushkin's fineness as a man, his gallantry, his wit, his style, the breadth of his concerns constituted as much of a reproach to the thuggish regime of Nicholas I as his "civic" verse. The man and his work were fused in a special way. Lermontov's defiant Byronic pose contained implicit criticism of the Tsarist world, and invited a mood of non-political dissent. Mayakovsky played the poet in a more complex way, affirming revolutionary values with one harsh, declamatory voice, while he suppressed another, more personal voice, at fatal cost to himself. Evtushenko is not the poet any of these men were, but he deliberately associates himself with this "tradition." That is why we are so much aware of the poet *performing* his poetry.

The *Autobiography* then traces the development of the public poet. He was a fairly rough, tough kid, from a Siberian village, who chose between poetry and soccer, learned the craft from the inevitable kindly mentors. He abandoned the early "private" work when the full horror of the Stalinist deviations—primarily ethical—from Leninism became clear to him, adopted the harsh rhetoric of the early revolutionary poets, and embarked finally on a militant campaign for the truth and against the falsifiers. The briefest comparison will show that the only quality he shares with his greater forebears is his vulnerability: the career of the public poet in Russia is dangerous indeed. Arrest, suicide, or death by violence, obloquy or exile, are all on the historical record. Whatever kind of poet we decide he is, or however genuine the new public personality he has made for himself, we must not fail

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to see him as a man who has accepted the gravest risks in the name of his cause.

The myth of the people's virtue complements the myth of the public poet. Evtushenko tells us that the people are kind, patient, devoted to the truth and to the Revolution. They were misled and mistreated by Stalin and his followers, and they fell into confusion after Stalin's death. It was the poet's obligation to articulate the masses' doubts and point the way back to the truth. This traditional radical belief in the *narod* is documented repeatedly in Evtushenko's narrative: while he waits for the editor's decision to publish *Babi Yar,* the old printer who has set the poem (provisionally, in the event it was accepted) comes out of the composing room with words of encouragement and a bottle of vodka; an ex-convict takes responsibility in a crisis, and shames a Stalinist bureaucrat; Evtushenko's immense, responsive audiences of ordinary people validate his poetic role as truthseeker and illuminator of the people's spirituality. This is time-honored mythology from the Russian radical past which has been sanctified in Soviet rhetoric for decades. With these respectable credentials he draws up his inventory of Stalinist evil, which includes every variety of dehumanization; and speaks impressively for his vision of a more humane world, better attuned to the needs and capacities of simple men.

There is very little about poetry itself, no detailed talk of the craft, only a few swift references to the work of his contemporaries. At one point he associates himself with the wider world of poetry: "I was intoxicated by Walt Whitman's immense reach, the turbulence of Rimbaud, the luxuriance of Verhaeren, Baudelaire's naked sense of the tragic, Verlaine's witchcraft, Rilke's sublety, T. S. Eliot's hallucinating visions, and the healthy, peasant wisdom of Robert Frost." But future students of poetry will look in vain for the living influence of these men on Evtushenko's own work. He has chosen a much smaller, more topical and more urgent use of his talent, as he has told us. And it must be pointed out that his brief invocation of the European tradition has its strategic purposes, too. The battle for access to the world's art is a central part of the assault on Stalinist bigotry and chauvinism. The pages are peppered with names—Hamsun, Freud, St. Exupéry, Mann, Nietzche, Hemingway. Let the Western reader understand that the new Soviet generation is not barbarian; let the Soviet eavesdropper understand that these names are indispensable to any participant in modern culture. The same urgent message is conveyed in his passionate defense of the modern sculptor Neizvestnyi and the modern painter Vassiliev.

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This book, one might conclude, is shaped by strategy, which makes it full of intellectual banality and political piety—a work of little intrinsic interest to the student of modern culture. In this sense, the rebel would seem to be tainted by the world he would transform. But if one sees Evtushenko in relation to the situation in Russia, it is possible to read the book through the euphemisms, as it were, as a daring polemic, a personal statement by a courageous, embattled and fragile man. There is no place where literature—as exemplified by a militant few—is engaged more fully in the cause of humanism. The record of Evtushenko's collisions with the cultural bosses—the time-serving editors, the poet-bureaucrats of the Writers' Union—not only testifies to his courage, but also indicates the terms of the cultural war. It should be remembered, too, that one of the cruellest risks he runs is estrangement from the purists of his own group, who may denounce him as a bad poet, a crowd-pleaser, an international clown. If he is able to maintain his public position and to endure as a person and to grow as a poet, he will at least have served the cause he stands for.

Rufus Mathewson

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THE FLOWERS OF EVIL

SAINT GENET. By Jean-Paul Sartre. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. George Braziller. $8.50.

It is hard to get over one's exasperation with Sartre for this cancer of a book, grotesquely verbose, its cargo of brilliant ideas borne aloft by a tone of viscous solemnity and by ghastly repetitiveness. One knows that the book began as an introductory essay to the collected edition of Genet's works published by Gallimard—some fifty pages, perhaps—and grew to its present length, whereupon it was issued in 1952 as a separate volume, the first, of the Collected Genet. Who has read all of *Saint Genet* in French, who will read it through in English, I don't know. Familiarity with Genet's writings in prose, most as yet untranslated, is surely essential. Even more important, the reader must come equipped with sympathy for Sartre's way of explicating a text, without guidelines. Sartre breaks every rule of decorum established for the critic; this is criticism by immersion. The book simply plunges into Genet; there is little discernible organization to Sartre's argument; nothing is made easy or clear. One should perhaps be grateful that Sartre stops after six hundred and twenty-five pages. The indefatigable act of literary and philosophical disembowelment which he practices on Genet could just as well have gone on for a thousand pages. Yet, Sartre's exasperating book is worth all one's effort of attention. *Saint Genet* is not truly one of the great, mad books; it's too long and too academic in vocabulary for that. But it is crammed with stunning and profound ideas.

What made the book grow and grow is that Sartre, the philosopher, could not help (however reverentially) upstaging Genet, the poet. What began as an act of critical homage and recipe for the bourgeois literary public's "good use of Genet" turned into something much grander. Sartre's enterprise is really to exhibit his own philosophical style—compounded of the phenomenological tradition from Descartes through Husserl and Heidegger, plus a liberal admixture of Freud and revisionist Marxism—while writing about a specific figure. Sartre gives his enterprise the unfortunate name of "existential psychoanalysis," but never mind about that. In this instance, the individual whose acts are made to yield the value of Sartre's philosophical vocabulary is the foundling-homosexual-whore-writer-thief, Genet. In a previous effort at "existential psychoanalysis," published in 1947 and kept to a more digestible length, the individual was Baudelaire. In this earlier essay,

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Sartre was much more concerned with specifically psychological issues: Baudelaire's relation to his mother, his mistresses, etc. The present study of Genet is more philosophical because, to put it bluntly, Sartre admires Genet in a way that he does not admire Baudelaire. It would seem that, according to Sartre, Genet deserves something more than perceptive psychologizing. He merits philosophical diagnosis.

Please note Sartre's dilemma, because it accounts for the length—and the breathlessness—of the book. All thought, as Sartre knows, universalizes. Sartre wants to be concrete. He wants to catch Genet, not simply to exercise his own tireless intellectual facility. But he cannot. His enterprise is fundamentally impossible. He cannot catch the real Genet; he is always slipping back into categories of Thief, Homosexual, Free Lucid Individual. Somewhere Sartre knows this, and it torments him. The length, and the inexorable tone, of *Saint Genet* are really the product of intellectual agony.

The agony comes from the philosopher's commitment to impose meaning upon action. The key notion of existentialism—liberty—reveals itself in *Saint Genet,* even more clearly than in *Being and Nothingness,* as a compulsion to assign meaning, a refusal to let the world alone. According to Sartre's phenomenology of action, to act is to change the world. Man, haunted by the world, acts. He acts in order to modify the world in view of an end, an ideal. An act is therefore intentional, not accidental. An accident is not to be counted as an act. Neither the gestures of personality nor the works of the artist are simply to be experienced. They must be understood, they must be interpreted as modifications of the world. Thus, throughout *Saint Genet,* Sartre continually moralizes. He moralizes upon the acts of Genet. And since Sartre's book was written at a time when Genet was chiefly a writer of prose narratives (among the plays, only the first two, *The Maids* and *Deathwatch,* had been written), and since these narratives are all autobiographical and written in the first person, Sartre need not separate the personal from the literary act. Although Sartre occasionally uses some item which comes from his own friendship with Genet, it is almost entirely the man revealed by his books of which Sartre speaks. It is a monstrous figure, real and surreal at the same time, all of whose acts are seen by Sartre as meaningful, intentional. This is what gives *Saint Genet* a quality that is clotted and ghostly. The name "Genet" repeated thousands of times throughout the book never seems to be the name of a real person. It is the name given to an infinitely complex process of philosophical transfiguration.

Given all these ulterior intellectual motives, it is surprising how

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well Sartre's enterprise serves Genet. This is because Genet himself, in his writings, is notably and explicitly involved in the enterprise of self-transfiguration. Crime, sexual and social degradation, above all murder, are understood by Genet as occasions for glory. It did not take much ingenuity on Sartre's part to propose that Genet's writings are an extended treatise on abjection—conceived as a spiritual method. The "sanctity" of Genet, created by an onanistic meditation upon his own degradation and the imaginative annihilation of the world, is the explicit subject of his prose works. What remained for Sartre was to draw out the implications of what is explicit in Genet. Genet has probably never read Descartes, Hegel, or Husserl. But Sartre is right, entirely right, in finding a relation in Genet to the ideas of Descartes, Hegel, and Husserl. As Sartre brilliantly observes: "Abjection is a methodical conversion, like Cartesian doubt and Husserlian *epoché*: it establishes the world as a closed system which consciousness regards from without, in the manner of the divine understanding. The superiority of this method to the other two lies in its being lived in pain and pride. It therefore does not lead to the transcendental and universal consciousness of Husserl, the formal and abstract thinking of the Stoics, or the substantial *cogito* of Descartes, but to an individual existence at its highest degree of tension and lucidity."

As I have said, the only work of Sartre's comparable to *Saint Genet* is the dazzling essay on Baudelaire. Baudelaire is analyzed as a man in revolt whose life is continally lived in bad faith. His freedom is not creative, rebellious though it may have been, because it never finds its own set of values. Throughout his life, the profligate Baudelaire needed bourgeois morality to condemn him. Genet is the true revolutionist. In Genet, freedom is won for freedom's sake. Genet's triumph, his "sanctity," is that he breaks through the social framework against unbelievable odds to found his own morality. Sartre shows us Genet making a lucid, coherent system out of *le mal*. Unlike Baudelaire, Genet is free of self-deception. Genet lives evil for evil's sake.

Saint Genet is a book about the dialectic of freedom, and is, formally at least, set in the Hegelian mold. What Sartre wants to show is how Genet, by means of action and reflection, has spent his whole life attaining the lucid free act. Cast from his birth in the role of the Other, the outcast, Genet chose himself. This original choice is asserted through three different metamorphoses—the criminal, the aesthete, the writer. Each one is necessary to fulfill freedom's demand for a push beyond the self. Each new level of freedom carries with it a new knowledge of the self. Thus the whole discussion of Genet may be

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read as a dark travesty on Hegel's analysis of the relations between self and other. Sartre speaks of the works of Genet as being, each one of them, small editions of *The Phenomenology of Mind.* Absurd as it sounds, Sartre is correct. But it is also true that all of Sartre's writings as well are versions, editions, commentaries, satires on Hegel's great book. This is the bizarre point of connection between Sartre and Genet; two more different human beings it would be hard to imagine!

In Genet, Sartre has found his ideal subject. To be sure, he has drowned in him. Nevertheless, *Saint Genet* is a marvellous book, full of truths about moral language and moral choice. (Take, as only one instance, the insight that "Evil is the systematic substitution of the abstract for the concrete.") And the analyses of Genet's narratives and plays are consistently perceptive. On Genet's most daring book, *Funeral Rites,* Sartre is particularly striking. And he is certainly capable of appraisal, as well as explication, as in the entirely just comment that "The style of *Our Lady of the Flowers,* which is a dream poem, a poem of futility, is very slightly marred by a kind of onanistic complacency. It does not have the spirited tone of the worlds that follow." Sartre does say many foolish, superfluous things in *Saint Genet.* But everything true and interesting that can be said about Genet is in this book as well.

It is also a key book for the understanding of Sartre at his best. After *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre stood at the cross-roads. He could move from philosophy and psychology to an ethics. The other choice would be from philosophy and psychology to a politics, a theory of group action and history. As everyone knows, and many deplore, Sartre has chosen the second path; and the result is the *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* published in 1960. *Saint Genet* is his complex gesture in the direction he did not go.

Of all the philosophers in the Hegelian tradition (and I include Heidegger), Sartre is the man who has understood the dialectic between self and other in Hegel's *Phenomenology* in the most interesting and usable fashion. But Sartre is not simply Hegel with knowledge of the flesh, any more than he deserves to be written off as a French disciple of Heidegger. Sartre's great book, *Being and Nothingness,* is heavily indebted to the language and problems of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, to be sure. But it has a fundamentally different intention from theirs. Sartre's work is not contemplative, but is moved by a great psychological urgency. His pre-war novel, *Nausea,* really supplies the key to all his work. There is stated the fundamental problem of the assimilability of the world in its repulsive, slimy, vacuous or obtrusively substantial thereness—the problem which moves all of Sartre's writings.

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Being and Nothingness is an attempt to develop a language to cope with, to record the gestures of a consciousness tormented by disgust. This disgust, this experience of the superfluity of things and of moral values, is simultaneously a psychological crisis and a metaphysical problem.

Sartre's solution is nothing if not impertinent. Corresponding to the primitive rite of anthropophagy, the eating of human beings, is the philosophical rite of cosmophagy, the eating of the world. The hallmark of the philosophical tradition to which Sartre is heir starts with consciousness as the sole given. Sartre's solution to the anguish of consciousness confronted by the brute reality of things is cosmophagy, the devouring of the world by consciousness. More exactly, consciousness is understood as both world-constituting and world-devouring. All relations—especially, in the most brilliant passages in *Being and Nothingness,* the erotic—are analyzed as gestures of consciousness, appropriations of the other in the interminable self-definition of the self.

In *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre reveals himself as a psychologist of the first rank—worthy to rank with Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and Freud. And the chief interest of the Baudelaire essay is in the acuteness and originality of his insights into Baudelaire's psychology, as revealed in his poems, journals, and letters. What makes *Saint Genet* even more interesting than the Baudelaire essay (though, at the same time, more unmanageable as well) is that, through thinking about Genet, Sartre has gone beyond the notion of action as a mode of psychological self-conservation. Through Genet, Sartre has glimpsed something of the autonomy of the aesthetic. More exactly, he has understood the connection between the aesthetic dimension and freedom, long ago and beautifully argued by Kant. The artist who is the subject of *Saint Genet* is not psychologized away. Genet's works are interpreted in terms of a saving ritual, a ceremony of consciousness. That this ceremony is, *au fond,* onanistic, is curiously apt. According to European philosophy since Descartes, world-creating has been the principal activity of consciousness. It's perhaps only just that world-creating be seen now as world-procreating, as masturbation.

Sartre correctly describes Genet's most spiritually ambitious book, *Funeral Rites,* as "a tremendous effort of transubstantiation." Genet relates how he transformed the whole world into the corpse of his dead lover, Jean Decarnin, and this young corpse into his own penis. "The Marquis de Sade dreamt of extinguishing the fires of Etna with his sperm," Sartre observes. "Genet's arrogant madness goes further: he jerks off the Universe." Jerking off the universe is perhaps what all

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philosophy, all abstract thought is about: an intense, and not very sociable pleasure, which has to be repeated again and again. It is a rather good description, anyway, of Sartre's own phenomenology of consciousness. And, certainly, it is a perfectly fair description of what Genet is about.

Susan Sontag

THE DRUMMER OF DANZIG

THE TIN DRUM. By Günter Grass. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Pantheon. $6.95.

From time to time we must re-examine the meaning of the concepts "classical" and "romantic," which, like the works of Homer or Dante, need to be retranslated or, in this case, redefined for every age. As we look at twentieth-century fiction, we see one kind of writing whose ideal is omission, whose unit is the vignette which yearns to compress itself into an aphorism. This is our classicism. And there is another writing whose aim is inclusion, whose basic form is the catalogue striving to heighten itself into a prose poem. This is our romanticism. To draw examples from France, where they have a way of being more exemplary, there is the classicism of Gide, Radiguet, Camus confronting the romanticism of, say, Proust, Montherlant, and Genet. The greater writers try to bridge the gap: Gide had to write *The Counterfeiters;* the work of Proust is shot through with maxims.

In *The Tin Drum,* Günter Grass has written a novel without equal so far in post-war Germany—let no one mention in the same breath the lucubrations of an Uwe Johnson. Grass's book is a major romantic novel which, in its carefully designed structure and economical use of a welter of incidents, approaches classicism.

Duality runs through the book. Even the provenance of *The Tin Drum* is dual, just as its hero, Oskar Matzerath, has two putative fathers. For the novel derives, first, from a French tradition—Grass lived for a long time in Paris—represented by writers like Jarry, Apollinaire (particularly the Apollinaire of *Les Onze mille verges*), and Céline, writers in whom furibund sexuality and Rabelaisian humor, sadism and stylistic experimentation and innovation, proceeded *pari passu.* There

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is in Günter Grass a great, metaphysical anger. But the anger comes at us in trappings of humor, eroticism, absurdity, poker-facedness—it is, in short, a Mardi-Gras anger—and is not readily recognizable for what it is. But its impact on sensitive readers is all the greater for that.

While adopting this French orientation, *The Tin Drum* manages to improve on its models. Explaining German romanticism to French readers, Heine wrote: "A French madness is nowhere near so mad as a German one; for in the latter there is, as Polonius would say, method. With unrivaled pedantry, with terrifying conscientiousness, with thoroughness such as a French lunatic cannot even conceive of, this German frenzy was practiced." *The Tin Drum* is also nourished by German romanticism. Oskar is the obverse of E. T. A. Hoffmann's Klein Zaches, another mischievous dwarf. Zaches has the magic gift of receiving the reward due any great action performed by anyone in his presence; conversely, Oskar has genuine talents of sorts, but they are sinister, and, directly or indirectly, lead those around him to disaster. The stealing of the Good complements the palming off of Evil. But whereas in *Klein Zaches* justice triumphs, in *The Tin Drum* injustice goes its merry way. It does not exactly triumph—there are no more triumphs in our day, not even triumphs of injustice—but it does go on.

The Tin Drum is the story of Oskar Matzerath, born in the Twenties, whose mother was a Danzig woman, and whose father was either her German husband or her Polish lover. The infant is gifted with an adult brain at birth, and resolves not to grow up to be a shopkeeper like the elder Matzerath. Aged three, Oskar throws himself down some stairs and arrests his growth; he refuses to go to school or talk properly but becomes a fiendish artist on the toy drums his mother keeps him supplied with. When a new drum is not forthcoming, he discovers that he can shout glass to pieces even at great distances, which proves a useful method of petty blackmail and, later, of other mischief-making. As Oskar grows older, he becomes the cause of the deaths of his mother and both presumptive fathers, and of several other people to boot. Not so much the cause of death as its catalyst, and who can assess the responsibility of a catalyst? So Oskar gets away with murder.

The story covers the rise of Nazism, the war, the collapse of Germany, but all only as reflected in Oskar's existence. He has many picaresque and demonic adventures: he becomes an "artiste" entertaining troops in Normandy, a "reincarnation" of Jesus who leads a gang of likable JD's into destruction, his brother's father if not his keeper (by having a child by his stepmother), and so forth. After the war, he sees fit to grow a little, but in so doing develops a hump. He is relocated

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to Düsseldorf, where he becomes by turns carver of funeral monuments, nude model for crazy artists, drummer in a jazz trio, and, finally, a famous and rich concert-drummer who, in solo recitals throughout Germany, drums elderly people back into their youth—a kind of faith healer, in short. Accused, at last, of the one crime he did not commit, he is found guilty of murder but reprieved to a mental institution. Though he finds happiness there, it looks as if he will soon be released. And then what? He is thirty, and he is afraid.

Such an outline does no justice whatever to the plot, let alone to the work of art. Günter Grass is also a poet, painter, sculptor, stage designer, dramatist, literary critic, and genuine eccentric; all these occupations have helped him fill his long novel with a splendid *mélange adultère de tout*. Grass calls himself a realist, but this is true only to the extent that he can describe with equal verisimilitude plain things like the contents of a grocery, more abstruse things such as the work of a stone-carver or waiter in a ferocious harbor canteen, and fantastic things like minor miracles. Always, however, the romantic poet is eager to take over. Thus we read of the child Oskar, in a garret, disturbed in his drumming by noises from the courtyard: "A hundred carpet-beating females can storm the very heavens, can blunt the wing tips of young swallows; with a few strokes, they tumbled the tiny temple that Oskar had drummed into the April air." The world is too much with Oskar, but the expression is not that of the worldly realist. Consider Oskar's words about how his mother, after four days' painful vomiting and dying, gave up "that bit of breath which everyone must cough up in order to obtain his death certificate." Whereupon, Oskar goes on, "we all breathed easy again . . ."[1]

The novel is distinguished by its blend of dreary reality and spectacular fantasy, of wit and toughness, of lyricism and amorality. If Grass's vision is realistic, it is the realism of someone who does not allow for optical illusions, who does not know or does not care to know the laws of causality, who has no visual or moral perspective: a sharp observer, but an observer from Mars. Thus Oskar watches a neighbor woman carrying a carpet rolled up and slung across her shoulder

1. Ralph Manheim, the translator, renders this as "the bit of breath which each of us must give up if he is to be honored with a death certificate. We all sighed with relief . . ." This loses not only Oskar's tone of almost innocent callousness, but also the terrible yet pregnant play on "bit of breath" and "breathed." Since Mr. Manheim's translation is persistently inept, I am obliged to make up my own versions.

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"exactly as she might have carried a drunken man; but her man was no longer living." And thus Oskar wonders upon seeing the toy soldiers abandoned in Danzig by a little Polish escapee, "Perhaps he had stuffed a few uhlans into his trouser pocket that they might later, during the battle for the fortress of Modlin, reinforce the Polish cavalry." Thus, too, Oskar notes that at his father's funeral "it decidedly smelled of dead Matzerath."

The salient feature is irony, but an irony which, for all that it is immense, is not savage. It is indifferent rather than angry, and the reader's own indignation must rush in to fill the moral vacuum left by the protagonist's nonchalance. Grass is a master of all ironies: simple, complex, multilateral. Simple: ". . . films in which Maria Schell, as a nurse, wept, and Borsche, as a chief surgeon close upon a most difficult operation, played Beethoven sonatas through the French windows and displayed his sense of responsibility." Complex—because it can do double duty, as when it not only lets the absurdity of a situation dawn on us slowly, but also affords a gruesome insight into Oskar's non-human reaction to a severed ring finger which he picks up with a collector's zeal: "Oskar . . . realized that the inside of the finger was marked high up to the third joint with lines attesting to its diligence, determination, and ambitious perseverance." (The translation completely misses the horrible, matter-of-fact disregard of reality, couched in a syntactical construction that treats the dead finger as a living being; Manheim translates: "this had been a hard-working finger with a relentless sense of duty.") And multilateral irony—when Oskar's tiny son, already somewhat taller than his father, strikes Oskar down and makes him muse: "Could he, too, express childlike affection such as is supposedly worth striving for between fathers and sons, only in homicide?" Note that the homicidal scene takes place at Matzerath Senior's funeral, caused by Oskar, hence the "too," i.e., filial hatred as something basic and inherited, viewed by Oskar as "affection" but of a "childlike" sort, a term suited to "sons" but here, as a zeugma, referring also to the feelings of "fathers." Yet in the face of all this, love is still supposed to be "worth striving for."

In a perceptive essay, Hans Magnus Enzensberger has examined Grass's style and found in it everything from syntactic ballets to imitations of the Litany, from rondos and fugatos to the language of case histories, from legal jargon to underworld slang, from dialect to gibberish. To this list should be added the technique of film montage, with all kinds of superimposition and cross-cutting, and certain devices of parody (e.g., the history of Danzig told as a cabaret monologue) also

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such stratagems as describing something that, it turns out, did not happen, then blithely going on to what did; or enumerating several possibilities of how something might have been; or getting at an important point only by way of the longest verbal retards. Add to this anticlimaxes and non sequiturs, and you begin to have an image of Grass's style. But then, out of nowhere, a whole prose poem, or a mere lyrical cadenza: "Stillness, maybe a fly, the clock as usual, very softly the radio." (Which Manheim prosifies into: "It was quiet, maybe the buzzing of a fly, the clock as usual, the radio turned very low.")

What makes *The Tin Drum* spellbinding, however, is something beyond story and style; it is the hauntedness of its author, and the personal myths he creates, full of urgency and driving power. There are a number of continually recurring motifs in Grass's work. Thus the play *Ten Minutes to Buffalo* deals with a fantastic trip to Buffalo, in which the destination is not reached. In *The Tin Drum,* Oskar's arsonist grandfather may or may not have escaped to Buffalo; Oskar himself tries to escape there, but never makes it. Another play, *The Wicked Cooks,* displays a horde of viciously intriguing ladle-wielders. These same cooks with their ladles recur in a poem in *Triangle of Rails* (*Gleisdreieck*), Grass's volume of verse. In *The Tin Drum,* the unloved and killed father is a passionate cook, and Oskar's final bogey, the only fear he cannot

THE STRUGGLE OF THE MODERN

by Stephen Spender

Shelley wrote that poetry should be both center and circumference of knowledge. In his new book, Mr. Spender applies Shelley's statement to modern literature in an attempt to reassert the relationship of literature to modern life. He discusses, mainly in autobiographical terms, books that he has read and pictures that he has looked at, recollecting and commenting on the characteristics which bear some relationship to the problems of a specifically modern art.

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shake, is "die Schwarze Köchin," a black female cook, whom Manheim foolishly turns into "the Black Witch," just so as to rhyme with "pitch"!

From the garb of cooks it is not far to that of nurses and nuns. Grass has publicly stated that nuns fascinate him; his private obsession with them is manifest in his fantasy world. As a painter, he has exhibited whole series of paintings of nuns, which is exactly what the painter Lankes does in *The Tin Drum*. Compulsively, almost all of Oskar's passions are for nuns—or nurses. The nurse is the secular replica of the nun, and her uniform is the photographic positive of the nun's negative. She, too, wears a cross, albeit a red one, and, in German, she, too, is called "Schwester." Nuns are the subject of a poem sequence in *Triangle of Rails* that reiterates, almost verbatim, certain passages of *The Tin Drum*. In the novel, nuns and nurses are repeatedly adored, longed for, made love to unsuccessfully, assaulted, raped, shot, deferred to, exalted.

Other obsessive motifs include the firebug, doves and seagulls, physical malformation. Now various commentators—including the blurb writer—have perceived Oskar as a symbol of the alienated artist, of guilty Germany, of corrupt mankind, to say nothing of diverse religious allegories. Some of these identifications may be in order, but they beg the underlying issue: Grass's unrelenting need to write the biography of his unconscious. Which is, of course, both the most and the least respectable reason for writing: it accounts for the best of Goethe, and for all of Sade.

This is not the time or place for an analysis of Grass's personal mythology, even if I were competent to undertake it. But something can be cautiously hinted at, something to which the polarity nun-nurse points, and which brings us back to the problem of duality with which we began. For *The Tin Drum* is fundamentally about duality. Its very narration shuttles, at the drop of a comma, between present and past, even as the narrator, sometimes within the same sentence, shifts from "I" to "he, Oskar." Oskar has two presumptive fathers: the solid burgher and amateur cook, Matzerath, who could "express sentiments only in soups," and the dreamy, dandified, sentimental Bronski—Germany and Poland, West and East, action and idea. Oskar's mother is hopelessly partitioned between two men; Matzerath is caught in the cross fire of scowls exchanged by the two pictures in his bedroom: Beethoven and Hitler, genius and madman. Oskar's two favorite books —almost his only ones—are the Dionysianly orgiastic memoirs of Rasputin, and Goethe's Apollonianly transfigured *Elective Affinities*. And, above all, the plot thrashes about between two poles. There is Oskar's

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insistent striving backward into the womb: as a boy, he keeps trying to hide under his grandmother's skirts; as a young adult, he still shuts himself into the clothes cupboard of the nurse he covets; at thirty, he finds the insane asylum's bed insufficiently crib-like. But there is also life moving forward and pushing Oskar before it: out of every asylum, lunatic or otherwise, and, ultimately, into death.

It is here that the couple, Nurse and Nun, becomes relevant. The Nurse stands for the return to the womb: Oskar cherishes a youthful picture of his mother as an auxiliary nurse; throughout the various maladies of his later life, nurses take care of him; often they hover over him while he enters a coma that is like the dark of the womb. At the other extreme stands the Nun, the black sister who succors the dying and prays for the dead. Oskar, significantly, craves both the Nurse who stands for earthiness (she is presumed to be of loose morality), and the Nun, immaculate Bride of Christ who points to the Beyond.

Our tragedy is that we fail in both directions: life can neither retreat into the embryo nor pass on through death. The main nurse in the novel cannot be possessed by an Oskar suddenly struck with impotence; the principal nun is, with Oskar's help, raped by someone else. The nurse is subsequently murdered; the nun, apparently, commits suicide. Fulfillment is not to be had. Oskar's friend, Herbert Truczinski, tries to copulate with a wooden figurehead in the shape of a naked girl, which would bridge the gap between transient flesh and enduring wood. He dies in the attempt. Oskar interfoliates his Rasputin with his Goethe, but the resulting mixture is a trick and delusion: life knows no idyll in which "Ottilie docilely strolls on Rasputin's arm through the gardens of Central Germany, while Goethe sits in a sleigh by the side of some dissolutely aristocratic Olga, as they glide along through wintry St. Petersburg." Indeed, in the end, even Goethe becomes a bogey for Oskar and merges with "the Black Cook": in death, to be sure, there is fusion, but what avails fusion then?

It is to be deplored that *The Tin Drum* comes to English readers diminished by Ralph Manheim's translation: in length, by well over a hundred pages; in quality, inestimably. Much that was either too difficult, or seemed too elaborate or obscene, has been flattened out, abridged, or omitted. On almost every page constructions, jokes, meanings are weakened, disregarded, or missed. None of which, however, has kept the translation from being extolled by literary and academic reviewers alike.

This is profoundly regrettable, because *The Tin Drum,* with its linguistic superabundance, its mythopoeic nature, its uncannily loving

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and palpable evocation of a city as it was but never again will be, its exploration of sex both bitter and humorous, its scatology, its dwelling on the father-son relationship while doing true obeisance to the eternal feminine, its religious coloring, its esoteric lore, its inextricable blend of reality and hallucination, its split between sensuality and spirituality, its wealth of magnificently grotesque invention is a German approximation of—you guessed it—*Ulysses*. Approximation only, not equivalent; but a spectacular achievement all the same. *The Tin Drum* pursues, dazzles, sinks its claws into the mind. Whether it can also ambush the future remains to be seen.

John Simon

JUNG AND FREUD

MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS. By C. G. Jung. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. Pantheon. $7.50.

I

C. G. Jung, who viewed autobiographies with suspicion, consented to the publication of his own upon condition that it appear posthumously and not as part of his collected works. Edited and in part transcribed by Aniela Jaffé from Jung's conversation, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* will be of interest not only to those curious to test the professional quality of Jung's self-awareness but also, I believe, to anyone concerned with the relations between psychoanalysis and literature—between, that is, the kinds of experience that each means to foster. One finds in the book few dates, little account of outward circumstance, none of the paraphernalia of straightforward public reminiscence; this is a *wanderjahre* of the spirit, whose theme is the inner self-realization denied by our utilitarian society. One must return to the works of the romantic artists, to Wordsworth's *Prelude* or to Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, to encounter a similar autobiographical intention.

The Jungian therapy proceeds from a theoretical affirmation of the cognitive value of man's fantasy-life, despite its lack of immediate acquaintance with reality. Jung has written elsewhere: "We only understand that thinking which is a mere equation, and from which nothing comes out but what we have put in. That is the working of the intellect. But beyond that there is a thinking in primordial images—in symbols

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which are older than historical man; which have been ingrained in him from earliest times, and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche." By engaging powers of mind neglected in a utilitarian culture, Jung hopes to challenge the very ground of our experience, to make possible a new and more valuable mode of personal being. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* charts a representative destiny, and appropriately recalls certain romantic literary performances: for the task of public self-transformation, of responding to one's inward life in the name of "nature truly experienced" (Jung's phrase), was explicitly the lot of romantic poets, and a concern with the legitimacy of the culturally accepted "rational" self has been a mark of the literary imagination ever since.

By the standards of heroic autobiography, however, of personal testimony to the cogency of a mode of experience, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* is not an impressive performance; it will do little to bring an unrest into our consciousness of being. I do not mean that Jung fails to realize the disquieting beauty, the transformation of experience into the stuff of a new art; that is the achievement of his romantic predecessors. One need not demand of the visionary that he work out the conflict between his imaginative responses and cultural reality within the limits of responsible form. It is his claim, after all, to be a significant phenomenon, not necessarily an accomplished witness, and a good deal of the literature of the past hundred and fifty years itself convinces us not by its precision but by the daemonic quality of its experience. Such writing, however, must remain free of cliché, of the accommodation between event and expression that indicates a failure to confront one's history directly: its lack of formal awareness must be complemented by an authentic sense of the irreducibility of personal fact. Just here Jung arouses suspicion: his manner, even in translation, is unfailingly and variously derivative, a conglomerate of sonorous romanticisms and easy homilies, of metaphysical borrowings and spiritual exhortations. One is continually disconcerted by a tendency to rhetorical bombast ("Like flames suddenly flaring up, these thoughts darted through my mind"), by a substitution of the language of melodrama for that of precise thought. ("Wherever the psyche is set violently oscillating by a numerous experience, there is a danger that the thread by which one hangs may be torn. Should that happen, one man tumbles on to an absolute affirmation, another into an equally absolute negation.") Jung's failure to either avoid the literary or create a style of his own leaves the impression that Jung has never really looked at his experience, that he has not permitted anything to work upon him beyond the limits of the ordinary. One begins to suspect,

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despite his testimony to the contrary, that Jung cannot release his grasp of the commonplace, that he is incapable of risk, so immediately and derivatively is the meaning of his available experience to him. Jung emerges from his visionary experience to caution us that we must learn to take the good with the bad, success with failure—how much more interesting, how *human,* to be capable of mistakes! I would argue that Jung's style—really his utter lack of it—is indicative of the movement of his thought, which endlessly substitutes traditional moral categories and hypostatized attitudes for the promised realities of visionary experience.

For an understanding of the clinical validity of Jung's position there is nothing to be learned from this judgment; the vulgarity—if I may call it that—of his conveyed experience, however, should give pause to students of literature who have praised his theories because they seem to support a kind of literary awareness. Ever since the romantic period, a premise of literary thought has been that certain criticisms of society can be made only through the agency of mental powers that operate independently of rational thought. We may speak in this respect of a tradition of visionary dissent, meaning by the phrase that currency of opinion which values imaginative constructions because they express losses and disaffections in modern life that reason cannot articulate. It is not too much to say that every major literary figure of the past century has been involved, in one way or another, in some such assertion; and yet it is equally true that the tradition still lacks an adequate aesthetic, a theory that accounts for the primacy of the imagination without insulting our sense of fact. Where Freud has been of no help, Jung has offered to fill the gap, to bridge the distance between our literary experience and our other kinds of experience. Indeed, he has extended his services to aesthetics quite openly, by distinguishing between the "psychological" artist who raises the materials of ordinary experience to intensity, and the "visionary" artist who exploits critical powers that are uniquely the property of art. For this reason, Jung's theories have received currency outside professional circles chiefly at the instigation of those concerned with literature. Yet it seems to me that any association between Jung's theories and those of literary criticism can have only a reactionary and cheapening effect upon the visionary enterprise. A literary judgment of the memoirs of a professed scientist should not, of course, influence the reception of his ideas; but the form of Jung's autobiography suggests that the caliber of his performance reflects the value of his theories to literature.

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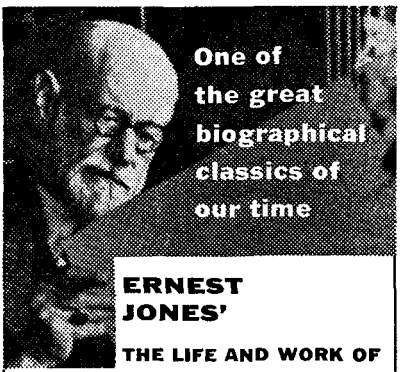
II

Freudian insights into the nature of the literary process have not been assimilated by criticism with either pleasure or regularity. No one can doubt that Freud's respect for the creative artist was real and intense; and yet, both in his general and his specific observations, Freud seems to deny art any cognitive function, any role in the business of coming to terms with reality. The situation is all the more remarkable when we reflect that, of all modern thinkers, Freud had come closest to justifying the autonomy of the artistic imagination. The existence of unconscious thoughts, of a second, "hidden" set of psychic contents ranged against those long familiar to empirical psychology, led Freud to argue the existence of a second psychic mechanism for the working-up of these thoughts to expression—one that corresponded to the rational faculty in the conscious sphere but operated upon principles distinct from those of grammar and logic. (Freud's epistemology is innocent of the current, vexed dispute concerning the propriety of distinguishing between a primary content or *datum* and its elaboration in a medium of expression.) The burden of Freud's *Traumdeutung* was to trace the workings of this second mechanism in its major instances, particularly in



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fantasy and dreams, and to defend the coherence of its function against those who would judge its products by the standards of conscious reasoning. "This peculiar dream-work," Freud wrote, "is much farther removed from the pattern of waking thought than has been supposed by even the most decided depreciators of the psychic activity in dream-formation. It is not so much that it is more negligent, more incorrect, more forgetful, more incomplete than waking thought; it is something altogether different, qualitatively, from waking thought, and cannot therefore be compared with it."

As many students of his work were quick to realize, Freud had legitimized by this argument the claims of imaginative expression to a functional autonomy independent of the strictures of reason: not merely dreams and reveries but the "higher" enterprises of art seemed about to receive their psychological justification. That Freud himself did not supply this justification is now a commonplace of intellectual history; the devices of imagistic expression remain distinct in his view from those of grammar and logic but only because they communicate repressed material—psychic contents incompatible with the organization of a mature ego. Freud's speculations concerning such devices reflect his general conviction that the unconscious is primarily a source of archaic impulses, of energies that have not yet been, or cannot be, fully converted to the service of reason and civilization. Whatever value Freud assigns the dream-work, as harmlessly releasing energies that might otherwise imperil the ego, there can be no doubt that on his view anyone proposing to take its products seriously is already on the way to mental illness, has succumbed to forces destructive of his proper humanity.

The literary critic faced with this conclusion is in for a bad time. On the one hand, he wishes to accept Freud's argument that the symbols of art are the sole means whereby a complex of feelings and associations can be communicated; on the other, he wishes to repudiate the notion that such complexes invariably possess a compulsive, underground character. The usual solution means impaling oneself on the horns of dilemma—distinguishing, in spite of Freud, between mere reflexive fantasy ("uninformed imagination," as Yeats called it) and the highly deliberative products of the poetic activity, and thus rejecting whatever insights psychoanalysis has to offer. Precisely here Jung contends for importance as a theoretician of culture: it is his claim to have completed the validation of the imaginative life that Freud initiated and left in abeyance, by reformulating the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious, its occasions, its mechanisms, its function. Jung offers, in other words, an account of how fantasy works in general that would

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justify the romantic poet's yearning for a life of sensations rather than thoughts; for him, genuine literature is the mature refinement of a more basic process in which the self is nourished by psychic powers beyond the reach of consciousness. According to Jung, Freud's "reductive" view of fantasy resulted from the over-stringent rationalism that governed his choice of a clinical standard by which to measure neurotic behavior. Jung's intention is to return psychoanalytic theory upon the path of its inner development by questioning whether the so-called "normative" ego was not, in fact, responsible for the incompatibility between itself and its unconscious promptings—whether a more generous relation between the evident and the hidden self might not be possible.

Jung's quarrel with Freud may be said to hinge upon his revaluation of the nature of dreams. As we have seen, the phenomena of dreams pointed for Freud to the existence of an unresolved conflict between the primal energies of the psyche and the demands of civilization: the dream is a facade concealing impulses that menace the self. For Jung, on the contrary, dreams indeed reveal *in the neurotic* the presence of psychic components incompatible with a mature consciousness, but the dream is not *in itself* a neurotic phenomenon and may, in normative instances, become a vehicle of energies valuable to civilized life.

> I was never able to agree with Freud that the dream is a "facade" behind which its meaning lies hidden—a meaning already known, but maliciously, so to speak, withheld from consciousness. To me dreams are a part of nature, which harbors no intention to deceive, but expresses something as best it can, just as a plant grows or an animal seeks its food as best it can.

At this point we gain an opportunity to judge the character of Jung's relation to the tradition of visionary dissent. That "nature harbors no intention to deceive" contradicts not only Freudian psychology but the entire movement of nineteenth-century thought of which Jung's system purports to be the inheritor. True enough, it was an ability of the romantic imagination to conceive nature normatively; "what man has made of man" appeared as the condition of exile from a stream of general tendency in the organic world. Yet nature, to which the visionary poet might return from time to time for spiritual refreshment, was not without its terrors—a famous passage in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* reminds us how Goethe found therein something which manifested itself only in contradictions, something which often betrayed a malicious pleasure and to which he gave the name Daemonic. The notion that nature is beneficient, that its processes support the mature self, actually culminates in the social vision of the eighteenth century, against which the roman-

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tic writers must be set in reaction: the latter see man characteristically as self-divided, yearning for the innocence and primal simplicity of nature and yet aware that nature is will-less, blind, incapable of moral satisfactions. The contradictory romantic perception is perfectly dramatized by Wordsworth, with his sense of the beauty and the terror, the resuscitating calm and the awful barrenness, of the natural landscape; it is exemplified by the movement of Schiller's thought when he writes: "It happens with us, at least in certain moral dispositions, to curse our prerogative, this free will, which exposes us to so many combats with ourselves, to so many anxieties and errors, and to wish to exchange it for the condition of beings destitute of reason, for that fatal existence that no longer admits of any choice, but which is so calm in its uniformity. . . ."[1]

My point is that one may discern in romantic literature, as a correlative to its sense of the primacy of the imagination, a conviction that man has cut himself off from nature *simply by being man,* that certain unnatural difficulties attend the cultivation of the human spirit even in its most vital and most generous forms. Although subsequent thought has moved away from the romantic ideal, it has done so only at the promptings of the romantic experience itself. That nature yields no benefits to man except as he successfully resists her, that man must distort nature cruelly in order to make his psychic energies available for the purposes of civilization—this testimony may be read throughout the nineteenth century, in the works of Spencer and the social Darwinians, in the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, in the post-romantic doctrines of aestheticism and symbolism, which see the artist sacrificed on the altar of his art, creating impersonal beauty by a process that entails his becoming ugly, grotesque, an aberration. If we are to grasp the spiritual import of this literature, we must recognize that the word "spiritual" can apply to more than religious intentions, that it has reference to certain moral and aesthetic conditions whose satisfaction distinguishes humanity from the rest of the animal kingdom. It was with this larger sense of the word in mind that Hegel argued for an ideal state in which the wounds of the spirit would heal without leaving scars; and it is the conveyed experience of what we have termed visionary dissent that in actuality the wounds of the spirit are everlasting, that even worthiest goals of civilization require irredeemable suffering as a precondition of their accomplishment. (A classic instance is provided by the fate of Dostoyevsky's characters, whose salvation depends upon

1. *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry.*

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whether they learn that suffering rather than pleasure is the source of human vitality.) One may guess at the affinity between this position and an esteem for the power of imaginative expression; for the task of qualifying by doubt the most enlightened and reasonable projects of society is not easily within the province of enlightenment and reason.

That the aims of this attitude are not frivolous, that the power of fantasy to move us beyond reason need not culminate in an empty gesture—these are provided by the practical issue of Freudian, not Jungian, therapy. Freud's psychological speculations run in the direct line of visionary dissent from the first. The idea of an unconscious, of thought-processes that occur beneath the level of self-awareness, was not novel to Freud, whose unique contribution lay rather in the recognition that this function is complicated by an irreconcilable conflict between the native propensities of the psyche and the requirements of civilization. The Freudian unconscious consists largely of *repressed contents,* of material that culture will allow only indirect expression, whose continual striving for immediate release is an indication of the profound discontinuity between nature and society. Throughout his career, Freud never ceased to lay emphasis upon his conviction that the same deflections of energy responsible for the great achievements of culture are responsible as well for the disturbances of the neurotic, that the mentally ill have succumbed to a conflict from which we all suffer. When we speak of Freud, we must remark upon the notorious ambiguity of his sentiments concerning the mechanisms of sublimation, of the conversion of organic into social energies. For, on the one hand, the biological processes from which our social energies derive are, according to Freud, indifferent to spiritual demands; on the other, the appropriation of these processes to any spiritual task presupposes repression and makes enjoyment of the social product difficult if not impossible. Nothing is more marked in Freud than his commitment to science and to those civilized values of discipline and order upon which the scientific enterprise rests; at the same time we must trace a growing suspicion on his part that these values may be self-defeating, that the preconditions of their accomplishment are such as to require a qualification in our attachment to them. The aim of practical analysis, as Freud eventually announced it in his *New Introductory Lectures,* was not simply to transform what was hitherto brute psychic energy into civilizing power (". . . so to extend the ego's organization that it can take over new portions of the id"), but simultaneously to relax our commitment to the need for this transformation ("to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of vision . .. ."). This return of Freud upon himself, this reawaken-

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ing in a post-romantic context of the romantic notion that the psyche has legitimate claims apart from the demands of civilization, imparts to Freud's system the quality of adventure and distinguishes it from mere abstract schematizing, from the sort of intellectual performance that is finally a juggling of categories.

In Jung's system, on the contrary, the connection between spirituality and the theory of repression is severed; and with it the connection between the existence of civilization and a universal propensity to mental illness. In addition to impulses that may be finally incompatible with the mature ego and so require repression, Jung identified another unconscious element, our relation to which is primary in determining the incidence of neurosis. The difference between these two elements may be illuminated by Jung's insistence that whereas the first group are directed towards certain fixed objects and therefore become associated with determinate images and ideas, the second group resists such association. Their medium of articulation, so to speak, is *archetypal,* not ideational—that is, a play of pure form manifesting itself differently at every moment of life, which is yet "determined," according to Jung, not because it gravitates to certain objects or gives experience a characteristic shape, but because it always and inevitably *compensates* for the limitations of conscious attitudes: if the latter is extravert, it will be intravert; if con-

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sciousness tends toward masculine and aggressive postures, the unconscious will express a feminine and passive outlook, and so on. For Jung this aspect of the unconscious is evidently a treasure-house of spiritual energies to which consciousness may accommodate without irreparable damage simply by liberalizing its character, forgoing a narrow preoccupation with its immediate concerns. The life-task of the individual may be said to lie in regularizing the passage of dispositions from this portion of the unconscious to the conscious mind, tempering his eager pursuit of ego-satisfactions by an awareness that the unconscious must be satisfied too, that psychic health requires the free development of whatever faculties are unused in conscious life simply to balance the self. It is tempting to read into Jung an assertion that the immoral, the perverse, the uncivilized and daemonic, are the normal, unconscious complements of a civilized consciousness; but in fact Jung is saying nothing of the kind. The unconscious, indeed, is a perfect source of liberal and humanitarian sentiments, causing trouble only when the ego loses its suppleness and becomes stern and uncompromising in the pursuit of its local aims. The result is psychic imbalance, neurosis. "The unconscious itself," Jung has written, "does not harbor explosive materials, but it may become explosive owing to the repressions exercised by a self-sufficient, or cowardly, conscious attitude."

Jung's defection from the Freudian ranks, then, comes down to this: Whereas for Freud the difference between the neurotic and the normal was ineluctably one of "degree," Jung manages by a redefinition of the term "unconscious," to argue for an absolute difference in kind. Like many of the post-Freudians, Jung has insisted upon the cultural sources of our inner conflicts only because he wishes to convince us that the fault does not lie in the human condition itself, that all is well with our metaphysical situation. In this light, Jung's acceptance by the literary mind reveals an interesting irony: his regard for the informing power of fantasy supports a qualitative distinction between health and neurosis, between a natural spirituality and one that contravenes nature, that it has been the tendency of our most compelling literary fantasies to deny. Repeatedly in the literature of the last hundred and fifty years we are moved to take a position outside civilization itself and to come to an accommodation between its demands and those of the primordial psyche. Those who would deny the possibility of finding such a position may do so, of course, with every show of logic, but they will have to dismiss as meaningless the kinds of speculation of which Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* is a sample—dismiss, too, the dynamics of Freud's terminology, which, whether we like it or not, articulates the only account of

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man's psychic life adequate to the modern experience of it. I would argue that Jung's "analytic psychology" succeeds with its adherents precisely because it effects such a dismissal: the terms of psychoanalysis, in Jung's employment, lose their historical associations and settle down comfortably within the province of respectable humanitarian philosophy. The voice of fantasy adopts once more the accents of reason, of a prudential liberalism.

Alvin C. Kibel

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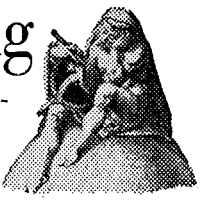

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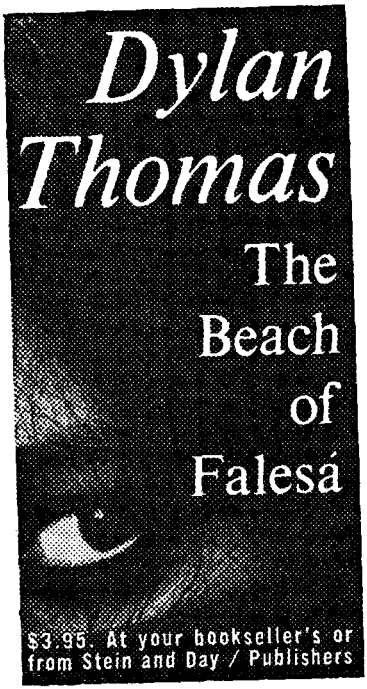

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SIRS:

I simply cannot understand how Miss Susan Sontag can say that the thesis of my *Metatheatre* is "absolutely right" and then go on to attack my thesis so thoroughly that were she even partly right, I, on every salient issue, would be absolutely wrong.

I shall restate my thesis briefly: tragedy, I claimed, is an impossible form for the skeptical modern, to whom all implacable values are false; tragedy requires the support of implacable values. But, argues Miss Sontag:

> What are the implacable values of Homer? Honor, status, personal courage—the values of an aristocratic military class? But this is not what the *Iliad* is about. Simone Weil seems to me entirely right when she argues that the *Iliad*—as pure an example of the tragic vision as one can find—is about the emptiness and arbitrariness of the world, the ultimate meaninglessness of all moral values, and the terrifying rule of death and inhuman force. . . . Tragedy is a vision of nihilism, a heroic or enobling vision of nihilism.

Now if the judgments expressed by Miss Sontag here are correct, then the conception of tragedy set forth in my book must be completely wrong. For what point would there be in asserting the difficulty of tragedy for the modern dramatist if the tragic vision implied nothing more than nihilism, a view of the world as governed by inhuman forces obdurate to moral feeling? Surely this view is the view of any number of modern writers, and I fail to understand why they cannot produce tragedy if meaninglessness is what tragedy is about. Let us forget the moderns for a moment. Why does Miss Sontag agree with me that Shakespeare was unable to write tragedy successfully—and that his only true tragedy was *Macbeth*—if to succeed in tragedy all that is necessary by way of values is a nihilistic view of life—however ennobled? Incidentally, what could such a view be ennobled by? Certainly there was plenty of nihilism in Shakespeare, as Wyndham Lewis pointed out in *The Lion and the Fox*. Why then, in trying to write tragedy again and again, did Shakespeare succeed only once?

The fact is that Miss Sontag is wrong both about Homer and about Simone Weil's interpretation of Homer. The Greek poet is not often purely tragic. He is that, though, when he can embrace in the same admiring contemplation both Achilles, wrathful against Hector, and Hector, against whom Achilles' wrath is fatally exercised: Achilles is the most perfect expression of implacability in all of literature. Such is Homer's vision that, despite our modern sensibilities, we are able to participate in Achilles' wrath, even as we sympathize with Hector's lucid courage. Now, I should like to see a work by some modern poet or dramatist in which so implacable a figure as Achilles is invested with nobility. I can imagine, though, any number of modern poets or dramatists able to make Hector sympathetic—Giraudoux did just that in *La Guerre de Troie N'Aura Pas Lieu*. And surely it is not because his vision was nihilistic that Homer was able to make Achilles sympathetic. The fact is that far from being a work of nihilism, the *Iliad* was practically the Bible of the Greeks, and the basis of Greek religion. Nor did Simone Weil ever call Homer a nihilist. If anything, she overstressed the moral order of the Homeric world. For in her fine, sensitive, but I think tendentious interpretation of the *Iliad*, Simone Weil makes the world Homer described much more moral than

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Homer thought it was, or even could have wanted it to be. Why, according to Simone Weil, do the characters in the *Iliad* suffer? Very simply, because they overestimate their powers. This they are tragically induced to do by having achieved some success in a prior struggle. Heartbreak, defeat, and death in the *Iliad* follow from a sin against measure. Now what has such a conception of the world to do with nihilism?

Miss Sontag, still arguing against my thesis, writes: "The tragedy of Oedipus is not caused by the fact that he, or his audience, believed in implacable values." Let us see. I assume that Oedipus and the audience for Sophocles' play believed in the gods; and the gods in that play are presented as bent on afflicting the people of Thebes with plague because a single crime has gone undetected: Oedipus's accidental murder of his father, Laius. What more would Miss Sontag like in the way of implacability? Apparently, though, she thinks Oedipus should not have punished himself for his deed. Why was *he* so implacable? The fact is, though, that he was. This is a difficulty for Miss Sontag, and her way of meeting it is to confuse her own, that is, modern viewpoint, with the Greek view. Miss Sontag asserts that Oedipus was innocent; but to the Greeks, a man who killed another, even by accident, was not innocent; his crime, however inadvertent, called for expiation. By the way, had Oedipus in the first of Sophocles' plays about him—not in the second play when Oedipus has already paid, and in full, for his deed—considered himself innocent, he would not have exiled and blinded himself. But then there would have been no tragedy. Evidently, if Sophocles had held the views of Miss Sontag, he could not have written his play. One does not have to like the

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way the Greeks thought about life; but why assert they thought as we do?

I also do not understand why Miss Sontag is so opposed to the judgments of Bertold Brecht and of his plays I made in the two pieces devoted to him in my book. Apparently Miss Sontag is in agreement with the position I took that the main form of serious play in our time is what I have called the metaplay; in fact, throughout her review Miss Sontag refers to the metaplay as if it were a dramatic form whose existence and importance has to be taken for granted. But Brecht is perhaps the most important of recent dramatists to have written serious plays. What kind of plays did Brecht write? According to Miss Sontag, Brecht wrote "didactic plays." But didactic plays would have to express some moral message clear enough to be recognizable. Now the testimony of most serious critics of Brecht is that his plays are morally ambiguous, and ambiguous in the extreme. As a matter of fact, my effort in the longer of the two pieces I devoted to Brecht was to show *some* clear content in his plays. Other critics deny that there is any.

Miss Sontag remarks that there are no more "sturdy exponents" of implacable values today than the Communists. And Brecht was a Communist. But I did not neglect to show that the dramatist's one effort to express Communist policy as an implacable value—I am referring to his play *The Measures Taken*—was put down. By whom?—by the Communists. The fact is too well known for Miss Sontag to have ignored it; she should have tried to explain it differently than I did.

Miss Sontag asserts that I spoiled my analysis of Brecht's work by interpreting that work in terms of "callow cold-war platitudes." Of such "callow cold-war platitudes" Miss Sontag cites only one: I asserted that Communists are against the individual. This assertion, says Miss Sontag, is nonsense. But then apparently forgetting she said this, Miss Sontag goes on to explain why the Communists are against the individual. Her explanation is that this is not due to Marxist theory—I never said it was—but to the cultural conditions of those countries in which the Communists happen to be in power. Now this surely is a false explanation for the anti-individualism of the Communists, and an explanation hardly fair to the cultural traditions of Russia, Poland, and Germany. But in any case, even assuming it to be a good explanation, one wonders about the reason for explaining a fact when one has just said that to point to that fact is nonsense. Why explain what does not exist?

It will be seen that Miss Sontag, though very much for my ideas, is also very much against them. And this has puzzled me. Looking for an explanation, I have come up with one which makes some sense, at least to me. No doubt Miss Sontag has read the very fine essay on tragedy by Gabriel Marcel in which the French philosopher makes the point that tragedy introduces us into a special order. This he designates the order of "for and against." What is this order and what has it to do with tragedy? In tragedy, says Marcel, one is forced to be against the hero to the very degree and in the same sense that one is for him. I think Marcel's idea a valuable one; moreover, it is perfectly consistent with the conception of tragedy I developed in my book, and it is of course very remote from any such claptrap as that tragedy springs from a nihilistic vision of a world obdurate to moral values. In any case, it struck me that Miss Sontag in reviewing my book may have tried to introduce into her review the very tragic mechanism she argues for and

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against in her review. I suggest that she has tried to be for my theory and against it, and against it to the very degree and in the same sense that she is for it. The trouble is that you cannot get a tragic experience into a book review, not even when that review happens to be about a book about tragedy.

Lionel Abel

SIRS:

Mr. Abel is very distressed because, although I praised his book lavishly (rating it as of far greater interest than any recent book in English on the theatre) and concurred with his main thesis, I still devoted a large part of my review to points where I felt he had overstated or misstated his case. My experience of his book he deems "tragic." I am tempted to say, in return, that I find his experience of my review comic.

According to Mr. Abel, where I agree with him, I am right; where I qualify or question his position I am writing claptrap. This will surprise no one, since Mr. Abel goes to the rather curious lengths of stating in his preface that he has written this book because he believes what he says in it to be true. He is correct in thinking that I do not believe everything he says in his book to be true.

The only proper answer to Mr. Abel's letter and its truncated and garbled version of some points I raised in my review would be for me to restate them again, whole. But since anyone who cares to can read the review, I will just note, briefly: I did not say that "the tragic vision implied nothing more than nihilism." I don't see why his contention (surely open to question) that Brecht is "the most important of recent dramatists to have written serious plays" means that Brecht must be a meta-dramatist like

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Pirandello, Genet, etc., because Mr. Abel has discerned (and I agree with him) that the typical modern form of theatre is the metaplay. And I stand by my criticism of Mr. Abel's talk about tragedy "believing in" the individual and in "moral experience." Mr. Abel is correct in denying the gift of tragedy, with few exceptions, to all cultures except the Greek. But as I said in my review, the Greeks did not enjoy the concept of individuality in the modern sense. It is precisely the metaplay which arises out of the concern with individuality.

Susan Sontag

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Mr. Peter Selz has asked us to tell our readers that he has objected to our change of title for his piece on Pop Art in the last issue of PR. His own title was "The Flaccid Art."*

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